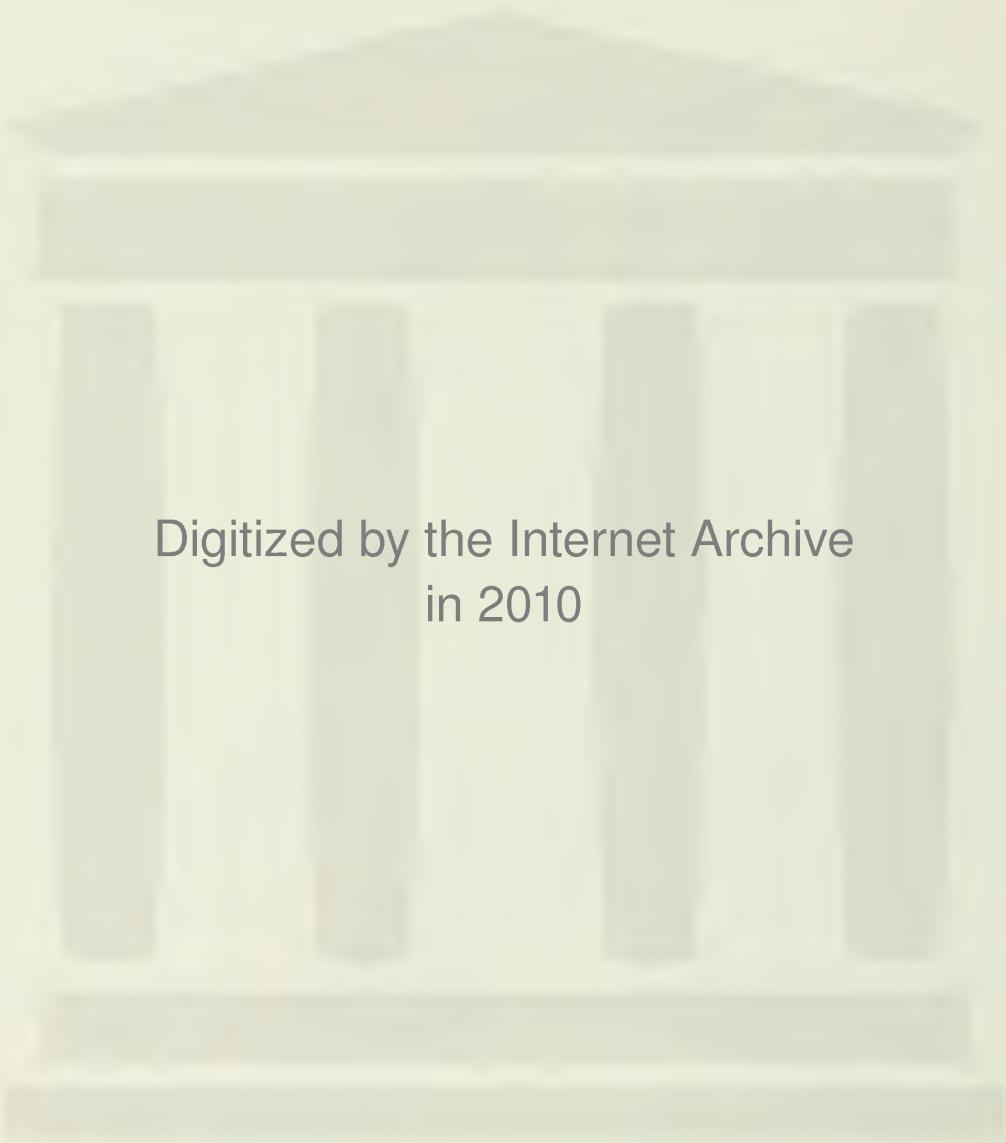


# PROCESSED WORLD 19





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PROCESSED WORLD  
41 Sutter St. #1829  
San Francisco, CA 94104

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# PROCESSED WORLD

ISSUE 19 • Spring 1987

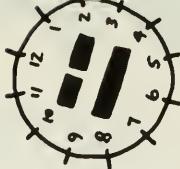
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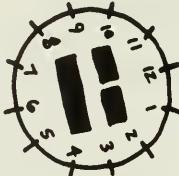
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With *Processed World 19* we return, flushed, but unchastened, from our special sex issue with a focus on a neglected feature of modern life—workplace transience.

America is becoming a land of transient workers and moveable workplaces. The job



turnover rate, supplemented by wave after wave of layoffs and forced early retirements, is cresting higher and higher. In this issue, we look not so much at the movement of workers away from old-line, dying American industries, but rather at the more aimless flow into and out of the new service, office, and electronics sector jobs. Where is the Information Age taking us?

According to a *Harper's Index* item (September, 1986), the geographic center of the U.S. population is moving west by 58 feet and south by 29 feet each day. Whether they depart from the drying husks of Eastern factory towns or from the bulging shantytowns of Central America and Asia, the white, black, brown, and yellow emigres arrive in patchwork urban habitats that offer very little community stability and even less job security. Stability and security of this sort are going the way of the manual typewriter and the great Amazon jungles. In place of the union hiring hall and the "permanent" full-time worker looms a "personnel services" industry that traffics in temporary and part-time workers, who comprise an ever larger proportion of the labor force.

To a great extent, the new workplace transience reflects the rise of low-paying, boring, and often dangerous "processing"

jobs that no one can tolerate indefinitely—or even, it seems, for more than 20-30 hours a week. Likewise notorious is the upper-tier job-hopping of salaried "professionals," whose career trajectories are described increasingly as "lateral movement." Upward mobility, that hallowed American artifice, is today more elusive than ever.

Does the growth in temporary and part-time work signal progress—a release from unsatisfying, full-time work? Does increased job turnover fulfill popular aspirations for greater individual autonomy? Probably. But what are the implications of workplace transience for workers—and for the workplace itself?

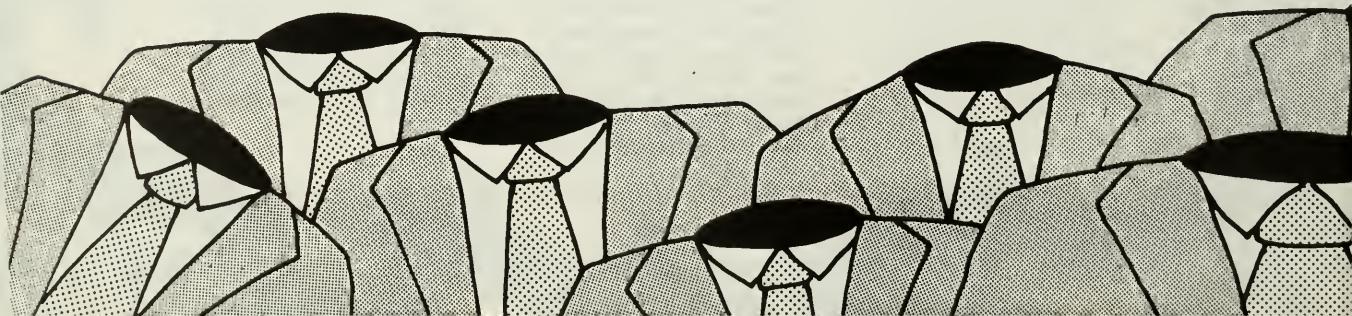
Throughout contemporary American life, there remains much to rebel against and to fight for. Many people might even agree on a limited agenda for social change. But what happens when people don't stay in one place long enough to develop common agendas, or, more important, meaningful ties to other people? Rootless people can and do rebel. But they rarely do so in groups. Instead, the social entropy of transience constricts the channels of rebellion to the most convenient, individual options—quitting frustrating jobs, moving away from uncomfortable social relationships, escaping disconcerting personal affairs, dodging a "bad record." Drifting, like gothic cowboys, through town after town.

Neighborhoods, communities, and workplace associations create bonds between people, a melding of personal and social identity. These bonds can impede the mobility that capital, always seeking more profitable horizons, historically has imposed upon labor. A people unattached to one another are more likely to move where business needs them and to pursue its exaggerated, competitively derived dreams of isolated good fortune. This is why a transient workforce has long been attractive to western capitalism, especially during periods of rapid structural decay and transition.

The personal autonomy to leave oppressive jobs, to "move on," is often the best option for individuals. During the current realignment of capital and culture, however, unbridled individual mobility gives free rein to capital's most rapacious and speculative tendencies.

What happens when workers come and go with increasing frequency from job to job? A cluster of articles explores this question—and raises others. In "Itinerant Cultures, Lonely Trails, Work's Diminishing Connections," Dennis Hayes examines the impermanence and loneliness of Silicon Valley work. Electronics has become America's largest manufacturing sector. But unlike auto, steel and previous such employers, volatile electronics firms rely essentially on a transient workforce. With the deployment of immigrant, temporary, and highly mobile professional workers, workplace organizing—and by implication, the power to strike for better conditions, wages, and benefits—has eluded high-tech workers. Is the workplace vanishing as a focus for collective rebellion? As electronics products assist in the economic transition to more servile, machine-paced office and shop work, workplace transience is structured into more and more occupations. In "Small Is Not Beautiful" Tom Wetzel describes the discontents and hypocrisy of the *SF Bay Guardian*, a nationally known "progressive" San Francisco weekly that has buffeted its workers with job-displacing automation and willful neglect. Wetzel documents failed attempts to organize among workers made transient by low pay and by part-time job assignments.

T A L  
H E

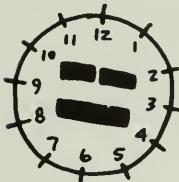


The author is heartened by the success of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), who vigorously, if temporarily, organized transient workers early in this century. At that time, however, the spirit of rebellion was given an immediately social outlook by the practical, often revolutionary, trade union traditions of European immigrant workers. More recently, American unions have lined up with banks to sell credit cards, have co-engineered CIA-backed intrigues from the Philippines to El Salvador, and have milked dwindling pension funds to the exclusion of workplace organizing. Today's immigrants are, as always hopeful, but unlike their European forebears, many arrive from lands where workplace organizing is greeted with American-supplied bullets fired by American-trained police.

Sophia Furia's "A Teaching Temp Talks Back" is a visceral exposé of a public university/community college system in disarray and of the milieu of underpaid and overworked part-time teachers that increasingly populate its faculty positions. S.F. describes the stodgy cynicism among tenured faculty, the bitter ironies that confront teachers who care about education, and the underdevelopment of fraternity among part-time teachers. Joni Hockert's view is "From Inside the Beast—Temporarily." A placement counselor for a temporary agency, Hockert tells all, including how temps and jobs are systematically mismatched, how secret discriminations result in the "release" of many temporary workers, and—in the author's case—how *temporary* temp counseling can be.

# KING D S

Has a nearly unbroken chain of union betrayals impaired our ability to imagine collective solutions to workplace problems?



What happens when workers confront, rather than sidestep, workplace problems? "Kaiser Don't Care, SEIU Neither" is a brief account of a strike by health care workers that ended in qualified defeat. But a special *PW* interview (by Lucius Cabins) with activists critical of, yet sympathetic to their union generates provocative dialogue and insights into the dilemma of workplace organizing. Our periodic column *Hot Under The Collar* returns in this issue with a report on the unlikely settlement of a bitter and often violent strike by Hispanic frozen produce workers in Watsonville, California (see *PW* 15 and 16) and the microchip industry's curious response to a study that found twice-normal miscarriage rates among its workers.

Fiction is an appropriate genre for exploring the trauma of the job interview—an occasion to which transient workers frequently must rise. Had a rough one lately? So has David Ross, whose "Thursday Morning" gets to the clammy heart of the matter. Vignettes of American work and its discontents are captured with angst and verve in "All in a Day's Work" by Kurt Nimmo. In the tradition of James Thurber, G.Y. Jennings' "Sand and Steel" depicts a bored accountant's flirtation with the boxcar transience of hobo life—and the hobos' little surprise. Thoughtful reviews of *Cultures in Contention* (Ed. D. Kahn & D. Neumaier) and Langdon Winner's *The Whale and the Reactor*, poetry you'll not likely see or hear elsewhere, and your letters round out the issue.

Our little surprise is that, in contrast to this issue's theme, a semblance of stability has insinuated itself into the *PW* collective. It's not often that a core of willful people can coalesce for long around such an unwieldy project. Frankly we're wondering if we shouldn't begin to worry. The chaos of

production is somehow becoming more tolerable, thanks to improvements in process—and product, we hope. We've seen the puffy face of the future—desktop publishing—and we're still blinking. But after a cautious look, we're taking the leap.

Financial stability, however, has been less forthcoming. We've managed to contain, and even reduce, some of our production costs. But we are about to launch—gee, there it goes—er, just launched, a campaign to increase our circulation. That means higher production and distribution costs once again. Wampum is what is wanted. You could help us immediately by subscribing now, or by renewing your subscription early, or by giving a gift subscription, or by suggesting a bookstore that doesn't yet carry *PW*, or by just leaving one on a bus seat.

In the meantime, enjoy this issue, and think about contributing to the next one, which, among other topics, will explore the health care industry from the inside out. Take some time to write us a thoughtful letter—we've moved letters back to the front to emphasize *PW*'s role as a forum for readers. And keep those articles, poems and short stories coming—hey, we'll read anything!



## NEXT ISSUE: HEALTH CARE from the inside out

\* \* \* \* \*

We want articles, cartoons, photos,  
Tales of Toil, poetry, etc.  
DEADLINE: June 15, 1987

PROCESSED WORLD  
41 Sutter St. #1829  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
(415) 495-6823





## MILITARY WORD PROCESSING

Dear PW:

I've been enjoying PW since #14, finding your unfolding anarchist rejoinder against wage slavery's network of ills by turns entertaining, inspiring, and depressing. The "bad attitude" runs rampant through the military, you might not be surprised to hear. As a survival tool, I find it invaluable; for example, in something over a year of constant use, I've come to view the Navy-owned word processor I'm not typing this on as I might view a capable and efficient business partner whom I privately despised. Sitting before the only shipboard VDT with an anti-glare screen and revising most of the memorandums on a comfortable old IBM Selectric don't make me any less uncomfortable about helping to move bombs around the Western Pacific more efficiently, and as my first and only tour draws to a close, I'd like to imagine that an awakening sense of my own political importance isn't doomed to wither with the realization that I'm just part of one of this consumer society's sick jokes. In a word, I'm not thrilled by the idea of going back to temping for General Electric.

Sometimes something clicks and my nights yield more than static ponderings of whether I'm dealing with love or confusion.

Sincerely, S.B. USS HALEAKALA

## WHO'S BORING?

Dear Processed People,

Hi. Well here's the latest *Twisted Image*. Our "Businessman Special" if you will. Yea, we take our fair share of potshots at "the Boss," "Mr. Executive," "Whiteman" or whatever else you want to call the strange beast in the 3-piece suit. But in some ways I think that's a scape-goat cop-out.

I mean is it REALLY his fault??

The fact is WE have to take responsibility for ourselves for this abysmal work situation (and that's never easy).

The reason most jobs are so boring, meaningless and unimaginative is because WE human beings in the 20th century are so boring, meaningless and unimaginative. The reason our jobs are so dull is because our spirits have become so dulled. The dismal hi-rise work environment merely reflects our deep-rooted spiritual malaise—an inner drudgery.

True, a lot of work will always be boring drudge: e.g. washing dishes, doing laundry, making beds. But this culture's genius for producing 40 plus full hours of drudge every week surely reflects some deep-rooted neuroses in the American psyche.

What I'm saying is the problem is more a spiritual one than a political one. In that sense *Processed World* has been a rip-roaring success in uplifting the spirit of the workforce. Keep up the great work.

—Ace Backwordssss *TWISTED IMAGE*  
Odditor/publisher 1630 University Ave. #26  
Berkeley, CA 94703

## ANIMAL LIBERATION...

Dear Processed World,

Before reading the article in PW 16, I had sympathized with some Animal Liberation Front activities, in both the USA and UK, yet I felt that their militancy was misdirected. That is, it generates a 'moral panic' against animal abuse, in ways that divert attention away from human abuse—be it massacres in South Africa or state-sponsored terrorism and torture closer to home here in Northern Ireland. Also, the ALF seems to evade the question of whether it's worth sacrificing some animals in order to benefit people, or it implicitly answers 'no.'

After reading Tony Lamanha's article, I thought more about how to challenge that loaded question, which assumes that the products tested—drugs, pesticides, cosmetics, whatever—really do benefit people in general. I now see better how the very existence of animal research serves to justify proliferating thousands more such chemicals. As the brochure you quoted says, 'By law, we must protect people from the potentially toxic effects of these chemicals through testing with animals.' By this logic, animal liberationists are portrayed as preventing researchers from protecting us.

Apart from technically 'unnecessary' cosmetics, even the 'necessary' drugs have become so as a result of the disease-inducing environment that this society has created and that the medical system

tends to obscure. One of many examples is the chemical input into the high-tech agriculture that results from the logic of profit-maximization.

From that perspective, perhaps we can reformulate the loaded question. We can value people more than animals and therefore oppose certain kinds of animal research—not simply when it is cruel, but also when it ideologically aids the chemical abuse of humans in our 'diseased culture.' This perspective would be worth developing in some detail, regardless of whether the present animal liberationists are inclined to take it up. More generally the problem can be located within the capitalist competition that generates new chemical commodities as technical fixes for social problems which themselves arise from still other commodities.

This whole area would be of interest to our new journal, *Science as Culture*. [This new magazine is well worth checking out, used to be *Radical Science Journal*—write it c/o Free Association Books, 26 Freegrove Rd., London N7 9RQ, England—ed.]

L.L.—London

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL DECENTERINGS..?

Dear Processed World,

Met four of your workers at the 'Split Shift' Colloquium in Vancouver B.C. August 21-24, 1986. Really enjoyed your (their) presentation, and as a studying philosopher in the field of information exchange, language poet, photographer and (at the moment) layout production person, can appreciate the situational attitude you invoke.

At the moment, I am moving into an analysis of the irrational (derivationally, aperiodic) equations of expression mapping the psychological decenterings which occur at the interface of the Marxian concept superstructure (with reference to the field opened by Gilles Deleuze's *Anti-Oedipus*, and his superstructure-superego [Marx/Freud] interrelation) and the concept of electronic substrates (referencing Chomsky's work on depth grammars); I'm wondering if you can offer any assistance with this by way of reference or insight.

In particular, since moving back to Toronto Ontario and obtaining employment, I have picked up a problem that is annoyingly nasty. My new workplace utilizes a radio station (AM frequency 1430) which seems to delight in games of Hegelian domination. Although I can easily outline them (that is, induce dissemination beyond the stratified archive of their reference), I can not undo the

para/situational focus of their panopticon.

Any suggestions, aid, insight, possibility of inducing radical alterity? I can't switch the station, or use a walkman, so I'm probably going to have to find a way to ax their medial substrate and induce an inverse decentering of their focal intentionality. I've been under this for three weeks.

On a lighter note, are there any specific areas you are looking for in theory/image/expression? I have a 12 year photo file of images 'significant' in a Barthian sense, as well as several files of post-structuralist composition. Glad to share. Hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely, J.D.B.M.—Toronto

#### TRIVIALIZATION?...

Hi there—

While I appreciate your having printed "My Date With Holly Near," I must cry out in rage against your having described it as "SATIRE" (!!!)—yet should I be surprised at yet another example of trivialization of female experience by the patriarchy—(YEAH.)

In sadness & wisdom,

Ann-Marie (and others in T.H.R.U.S.H.)

NYC

#### A FAILURE?

Dear PW,

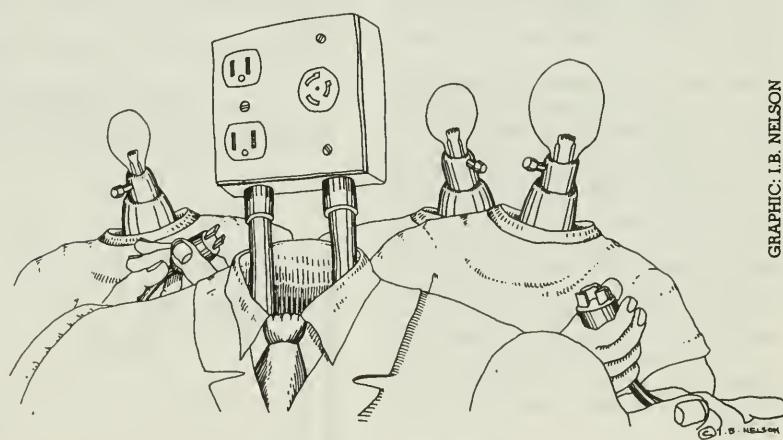
According to the dictates of the sexual revolution and all self-respecting baby-boomer married yuppie parents, I am a failure. I neither coupled nor started a family and I was stuck in a lousy job for fifteen years. But I don't feel like a failure. To society, though, the never-married, never-coupled woman is invisible, half dead or a ludicrously frustrated spinster whose tribulations evoke only amusement from the superior "fulfilled." We

don't exist, only happy married couples do. The highest rated sitcom is about a healthily sexual, wealthy traditionalist obstetrician and his lawyer wife and their numerous offspring. But it might just as well be about a Neanderthal tribal chieftain surrounded by proofs of his manhood. The undertones ring out paeans to old, reliable patriarchy and to some, apparently, the hope is held out for some juicily clini-'joyous' lithotomy-position delivery room scenes. (The star also has a comedy routine out about his wife's labor.) Meanwhile, the world is slowly rotting from STD's, pornography and a concomitant rise in puritanical repression, not to mention an astronomical rise in lawsuits against obstetricians.

But I am outside that. In my case, it was either accept the Yasir Arafat clones thrown at me or remain single. I chose the latter, with no regrets. (With relief, too. They wanted to go out with me again.) Of course, I can't share stories about my children or spouse, because I don't have any. But then, I also don't have to worry about AIDS or penicillin resistant gonorrhea, just sneers ("You can talk if you ever have any children!")

I don't know what hurts more, not being coupled or being discriminated against because of the situation. But then I think of the Yasir Arafat clones, roaming menacingly in wolf pack fashion from singles function to singles function halfway across town and I get down on my knees and thank God I'm single and I hope and pray that by this time *they* are married.

There is a person with whom I share a mutual attraction, but he is outgroup (different religion) but far, far nicer than anybody I have ever gone out with. I don't even know if he's married. In fact, I don't know much about him at all.



GRAPHIC: I.B. NELSON

# LETTERS!

Maybe the way this crazy world is rotting beneath its most recently acquired veneer of hypocritical wholesomeness, I should be glad it's only a friendship I have with him. Maybe Somebody up there is looking out after me. I may also just happen to wind up having the last laugh, if a somewhat grim one.

Anyway, issue #18 was a *wild* one with a lot to ponder. I found myself laughing at some darkly humorous parts until my eyes teared. And I'm hiding it under my pillow.

Auntie Mimi—Merion Stn. PA

## TOO STRAIT FOR ME!

PW:

Please cancel... if you can't make a little fun (i.e. make visible) of gay men from S.F. ya gotta be outa touch—

eat shit & smile,  
anonymous—Boston, MA

Dear Anonymous,

We get a slashed cover and a vague, though emphatic, charge—"too strait (sic) for me." I don't know what to make of it. It's hard to respond to shot-gun denunciations. So here is a response composed around the pellets.

Processed World just did a sex issue and you say there wasn't anything, or at least enough, on gay stuff. But to be accurate, I wrote a *Tale of Toil* about working at the AIDS Hotline, Jeff Goldthorpe wrote a fictionalized piece on a bisexual man's AIDS anxiety, and Manning's article on the sexual revolution touched on lesbian and gay concerns.

Okay, there wasn't a big feature article on "the GAY ISSUE." And indeed, maybe there should have been. There are a lot of articles, graphics, stories, and poems out there that PW should print and doesn't simply because they don't come our way.

One thing in the issue that I myself got angry at was Ana Logue's Talking Heads piece. That tautological bullshit about heterosexuality being the "merging of male and female sexuality," supported by a rather shaky Masters and Johnson study was really too much to take. Only a kind of misapplied sociology would attempt to quantify imagination and as for connecting sex and effort—how positively Roman Catholic! Also, as a matter of fact, some men climax very gently and only after time am I aware of when they come. I would never be boorish enough to ask directly, so I inquire discreetly, "Is that enough?"

—Mark Leger



PHOTO: KARL RYSTED

## \$13 HAIRCUT REVISITED

Dear PW gang,

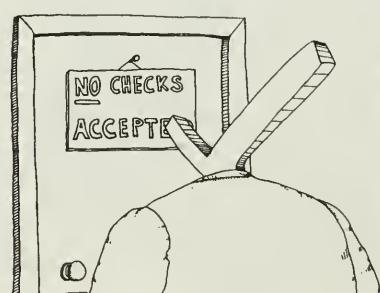
Great issue. Of course it did happen to be on one of my favorite topics, but that's no excuse. I don't have much profound to say about the thang other than it worked, read well, and had some of your best graphics yet.

The one thing I can't figure out is what Chaz Bufo means by "the \$13-haircut level of awareness." Is this supposed to be good or bad? I ask because I go to my neighborhood barber here on 16th St. and he charges me \$13 when he cuts my hair. (Which is usually about a month and a half later than would look best.) Am I paying too much or too little? Is Chaz looking down on me because he gets \$22 haircuts? Or is he looking down on me because anyone in their sane minds wouldn't pay \$13 for a lousy haircut? Or maybe he actually thinks that those of us into that \$13-haircut level of awareness are the real cool guys, i.e. the blue collar workers, etc. who frequent his theatre. I dunno. I can't tell from his article. This is obviously an important new concept in political analysis and deserves clarification.

Other than that, keep up the good work.

Bip,

J.K., a subscriber—S.F.  
(not to be confused with the J.K., a subscriber—S.F. in #18's letter column.)



GRAPHIC: I.B. NELSON

## NOT ALL WOMEN ARE STRAIGHT

Dear PW,

First I'd better say that I like certain kinds of porn, hate other kinds & I'm anti-censorship. And boy, did I have trouble with Chaz Bufo's article. I found parts of the article simply annoying, and other parts simply infuriating. In the annoying category:

1. I don't like the authoritative way in which C.B. states "facts" that simply aren't well researched. He says that the anti-porn feminist groups ignore splatter films & objectification in advertising, which isn't true. WAVPAM, WAP and the very scary NY group WAR all focus on these areas—but it's not as press worthy as the media-hyped "war on pornography."

2. C.B. says there's no evidence linking pornography & rape. Actually, there are studies which do make this link—the link is as tenuous as it is in most "social science" studies—but it's interesting. For example, in a 1981 UCLA study a group of 500 young men (white, middle-class) were given five versions of a pornographic story to read, which ranged from vanilla sex between a man & woman to one in which the woman was tortured by the man. 70% of the men found the version in which the woman was in the most pain to be the most erotic. 50% of the men, when asked, said that if they could rape a woman and get away with it, they would. (This compared to 5% of the non-porn-watching control group.)

3. As I said, I find these studies interesting—and that's it. They are not "facts" or "proof" of anything. And I don't take kindly to C.B.'s presenting the 1970 Presidential Commission on Pornography and Henry Hudson as "authorities" on pornography that I'm supposed to trust. I get government authority shoved up my butt every day, thank you very much. And since C.B. likes Henry Hudson's statement about the lack of "scien-

tific data" linking porn & rape—where's the "scientific data" linking the state of Denmark's deregulation of porn and the drop in reported sex crimes? Couldn't something else also affect the drop in reporting to police? What is a sex crime in Denmark anyway? And whose statistics are these? Why are we supposed to believe them?

Now we're getting to the truly fucking infuriating part.

1. The idea that women objectify men for money the way men objectify women for appearance ("every bit as much, if not more") is really insulting when you look at the real economic reasons why a woman (straight or not) might seek out a man with money; and one line about the "economic discrimination women face" does not do justice to women's situation. We know that women have traditionally been economically dependent on men. We know that single women support children far more often than single men do—and support them on far less. We know that most poor people in this country are women and children. In light of this, the stuff about women looking for middle-class men to "entertain them in style" seems almost gruesomely ironic.

2. "Most women are drawn to money and power like buzzards to carrion." !!!!! And most men aren't????

3. "A great number [of] women won't even look at low-paid men because of class prejudice..." The word women does not mean "straight, white, middle class female." More clearly: NOT ALL WOMEN ARE STRAIGHT. And on: most working class women form relationships with men of their own class, at least partially because of shared backgrounds and interests. Class prejudice? NOT ALL WOMEN ARE MIDDLE CLASS. And not all working class people are men, and not all blacks are men...

4. The idea about women being able to get laid more easily than men—C.B. mentions the risks of pregnancy a little glibly for my tastes. (Think of the difficulty a poor teenage girl might have in obtaining reliable birth control. Or a teenager in a small town.) And finally, C.B. mentions the repressive conditioning that keeps women from satisfying their sexual needs (with all those available men, the implication seems to be—but since I've already mentioned the existence of dykedom with some heavy-duty capitals...) I suggest that if more men could overcome their repressive conditioning and explore fantasies of loving men, there would be more sexually satisfied men and *perhaps*, but not necessarily, fewer Back Door customers.

Yours in ire & anarchy,

Alessandra—Brooklyn, NY

P.S. Hated Wenda. Everyone hates white middle class women. Cuz they've just enough power to make it easy, and just enough weakness to make it safe. Even white middle class women like me hate white middle class women. Like me.

#### A BOOK OF LOVE?

Dear Friends,

Issue #18 was interesting. My only reservation concerns Chaz Bufe's article, "Poles 'n Holes..." The comment about St. Paul's attitude toward women is reductionist and unnecessary; the quote from the Bible was taken out of context. In the same passage, Paul says, "The husband must give the wife what is due to her, and the wife equally must give the husband his due." (I Corinthians 7.3) While Chaz Bufe's claim that "male dominance has its roots in antiquity" is true for the most part, a skewed interpretation of the New Testament, which is about love, will not bolster the argument any.

Sincerely, K.M.R.—Norman, OK

Dear Admirers,

Gosh! I'm flattered that you all thought my article was so important that you de-



# LETTERS!

cided to send your compliments. Now to answer your queries and comments....

J.K. — The Back Door was sandwiched between a hair styling salon and a poodle grooming parlor (both featuring \$13 cuts), and it might have been my imagination, but it sure seemed like an awful lot of customers would be clipped and groomed and then pad on over to the Back Door...

Sorry K.M.R., but Nietzsche was right when he said, "One had better put on gloves before reading the New Testament. The presence of so much filth makes it very advisable." Neglecting the fact that K.M.R. cited the wrong verse (it's actually Ephesians 5:22), the statement that this misogynist declaration was taken "out of context" is downright breathtaking. The entire bible is an exercise in misogyny. I would advise anyone with a strong stomach who doubts this to read the miserable thing. A book of love? Please! Consider this: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26) A few other relevant passages, among

dozens I could mention, are: Matthew 19:12, 1 Corinthians 7:1, and 1 Corinthians 11:9.

Taking Alessandra's comments in order: I'm unaware of the supposed anti-violence "focu" of anti-pornography groups such as those she mentions. The "foci" I am aware of are attempts to pass anti-erotic censorship laws (often in close alliance with right-wing authoritarians) and verbal and physical harassment of porn buyers and sellers.

The point I made in reference to the presidential commissions is simply that these panels were both appointed by conservative anti-porn presidents, and, especially in the case of the Meese Commission, were seeking validation of pre-conceived anti-porn attitudes. And they could find no real evidence to support their views! One would have to be blind not to see the significance of this.

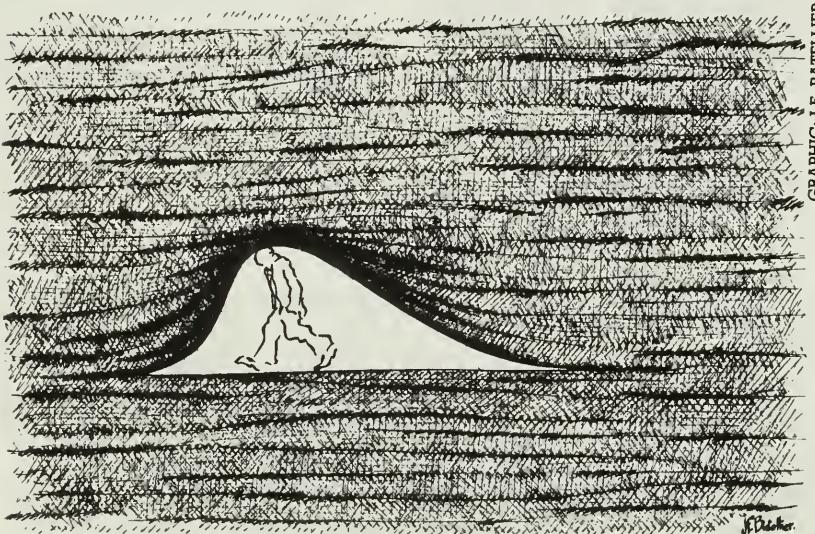
The results of legalization of pornography in Denmark (a drop in the number of reported sex crimes) are common knowledge. See for example Look, 7-29-69, and US News & World Report 10-19-70.

As to what "infuriates" her, please notice that she doesn't deny anything I say. She simply attempts to explain away any responsibility women might have for these situations, and to lay blame on men.

I deliberately used inflammatory terminology such as "buzzards" and "carrión" to enrage readers such as Alessandra. For far too long sexual politics, especially in leftists circles, have been discussed in terms of blame and guilt—the guilt of men. And I'm sick of it. I'm sick of men being presented as evil beings and women being presented as non-responsible (and thus powerless) victims. If you consider women responsible adults, it follows that they're responsible, just as men are, for the maintenance of this sick society.

Women and men do "objectify" each other. Capitalism has turned us into a society of hookers and johns—a society in which men seek women because of their looks and women seek men because of their money and power. If we ever want to move beyond this sorry situation, we need to recognize how the attitudes and behaviors of both sexes have been warped. And we need to quit blaming each other.

—Chaz Bufe



GRAPHIC: J.F. BATELLIER

## DAMN GOOD SATIRE!

PW:

Hey! It was delightful and entertaining and p.c. and damn good satire to have published James Pollack's extraordinary feature: 'WENDA'. Great tag for a name of this human phenomenon. (Was James ever, in real-life, married to one of these 'Wenda' women, I wonder..? Wouldn't

surprise me..Maybe his mother became one!) At any rate, I think he deserves the *National Lampoon* literary award if there was such a thing.

Meanwhile...Overall, I found this story feature to be poetic prose with poetic justice. Frank Zappa would love it and if it came out of his own think-tank, he'd

record it with some of his surrealistic jazz in monologue flavors. "Wenda" is and was truly SUBLIME SURREALISM (!) MMMMMmm! It tasted very, very good to my mind, and I'm speaking as an American woman in my 30s who feels a revulsion to "those" kind of women as much as Mr. Pollack, Zappa, Fellini, Warhol, and Mr. Funt, and Ernie Kovacs, and Nichols & May, and all the rest of them did and do!

I was struck by the beginning where it is described "Wenda was everywhere. You never knew..." "...at the Ferrari place selling Ferrari..." I flashed on two women I know who sell cars. They're terribly boring and pretentious humans, like a 'Wenda,' but they belong to another subculture-group called recovered alcoholics.

"They all had make-up on back to their ears..." That struck a high note for me. A Zappa-chord! And, yes, of course, to simply simplify it all in one or two words, this story-message is about 'phonies' and 'clones' who happen to be female. Zappa did a song-talk-satire about gay-clone-men, some years back. The phrase, 'transient sensuality'... I'm still pondering this in various interpretations to fit my existence, but I do like it.

The reader must flow with the surrealism of Mr. Pollack's writing as it goes deeper and deeper in all senses of the word, 'deeper.' Soon he's satirizing the idiot-clone-high-tech-white-men in his story!

(That's how I see it!) I was acquainted with Bukowski. That guy is a 'pig' in the 1960s/70s put-down sense of the word.

Oh! I noticed dozens of 'Wendas' in Las Vegas!! Where else? You can't get out of Vegas or Tahoe without seeing one or accidentally touching one, as much as you may try NOT to! Of course, there's 'SEXY' Wenda-type-clones who pose naked for assorted magazines that cater to unimaginative, infantile, perpetually adolescent men, who for the most part have a dick-head for a brain. (Though some of them give good head, don't get me wrong).

Finally, "Womankind in the real"? That's debatable, sir. You get pretty carried away, don't you? Now your story is perceived by me to being a nightmare-creation by two woman-hating, misogynists who suffer gynophobia, yet they have a career in producing, creating, MANNEQUINS for the most expensive clothing stores in the world! They symbolically "kill" the images their mannequins represent and try to sell to women of the "civilized," white-world. The story is two and three-fold as a reader such as myself can see the mannequin, "Wenda", became an actual human female and then she becomes a mannequin and then she becomes a human again, and back to a mannequin where the two designer-low-tech-high-tech-ambitious but disheartened creators symbolically kill 'her' in a final, angry gesture toward the world of manufacturing/materialism. I also see this story evolving to 'making-fun' of male DOCTORS and all that they've tried, invented, explored, poked, probed, strobed upon women, both physically AND mentally. So be it. (This is after a 3rd reading!)

best wishes, A.S.—Santa Cruz

#### A WORD FROM PRISON

Dearly beloved,

how the hell are ya, hmmm? Really do hope all is well as you can handle it. From the looks of it, y'all are still pushing the boulders...ah, but i notice that you've got a few more real proles involved—good show.

And i notice that you've moved also... hopefully for the better or at least with the potential of getting better... It seems that the collective has grown a bit and also stabilized into something of a family or menage of several, but i would be most interested to know something of what has developed besides the demise of Bank of America...

But at 17 issues the *raison d'être* of such an effort—with all its vituperations against management, the state, and

(sometimes) capital—must be becoming something of a fixation. Indeed, 'my' argument for PW is that even though the accusations of "closet" whatever-ism may be true you are at least doing something more than merely talking about some correct line or engaging in reifications as if the occasional allusions to sabotage and petty theft is of any real consequence to the status quo. The average person thinks in terms of marketable skills and career opportunity as a result of the conditioning and education via the existing social institutions and media. The pressure to conform to this rat race is most evident in the growing number of job-related injuries, illness, turnover and suicide among the young conscripts into the job market. You make this public...

In any case, one would think the point of PW is to expose, not only the obvious transgressions of capital but the available alternatives as well. Indeed, someone should ask how it is that so many of these things one may see in the company or upon quasi-anarchists or anti-authoritarians is manufactured and produced by capitalists. How is it that there is little of real value or use resulting from this 'milieu' of the avant garde? Other than genres of entertainment or distraction what are we to expect of these relationships—the nonetheless wealthy socialists to the poor would-be anarchists who eventually sell out for the imperatives of existence as just another number? We shall see #18, 19, 20, *ad infinitum*. Meanwhile the ongoing worldwide civil war grows near and more prisons will be needed or more

workers... and of course more computers and data processorzzzzz.

Well, ya see how the whole thing is headed for something only reformed authoritarians can understand but if these new prisons are any indication of what is afoot then all that futuristic, monitored workers, and taylorized work stations is a certainty—not that it will be really necessary for the average proletariat but rather that it is becoming part of the *accoutrement* of the corporate state and authority—but so is the failure of the anti-authoritarian intelligentsia to provide that necessary orientation and discipline by example...

Most of the commodities, and social services are developed and produced via the machinations of the status quo—but what are the alternatives? That you or we the readers "live well" is of very little support to those people who *must* live in the streets or/and fight to survive...

Therefore it is said that you only represent the symbolic and part time 'bad attitudes' and at best the intellectual dilettantes—and thus an animosity builds in spite of attempts of the more experienced to maintain the focus and conscientiousness for what is crucial to any real future choice... My personal hope is that you at least succeed far beyond #18 etc. But it is also hoped that you realize that what is (or is not) done today serves to define future alternatives and the matter of choosing (you kno' 'solidarity'). Nevertheless, take care of yourselves—

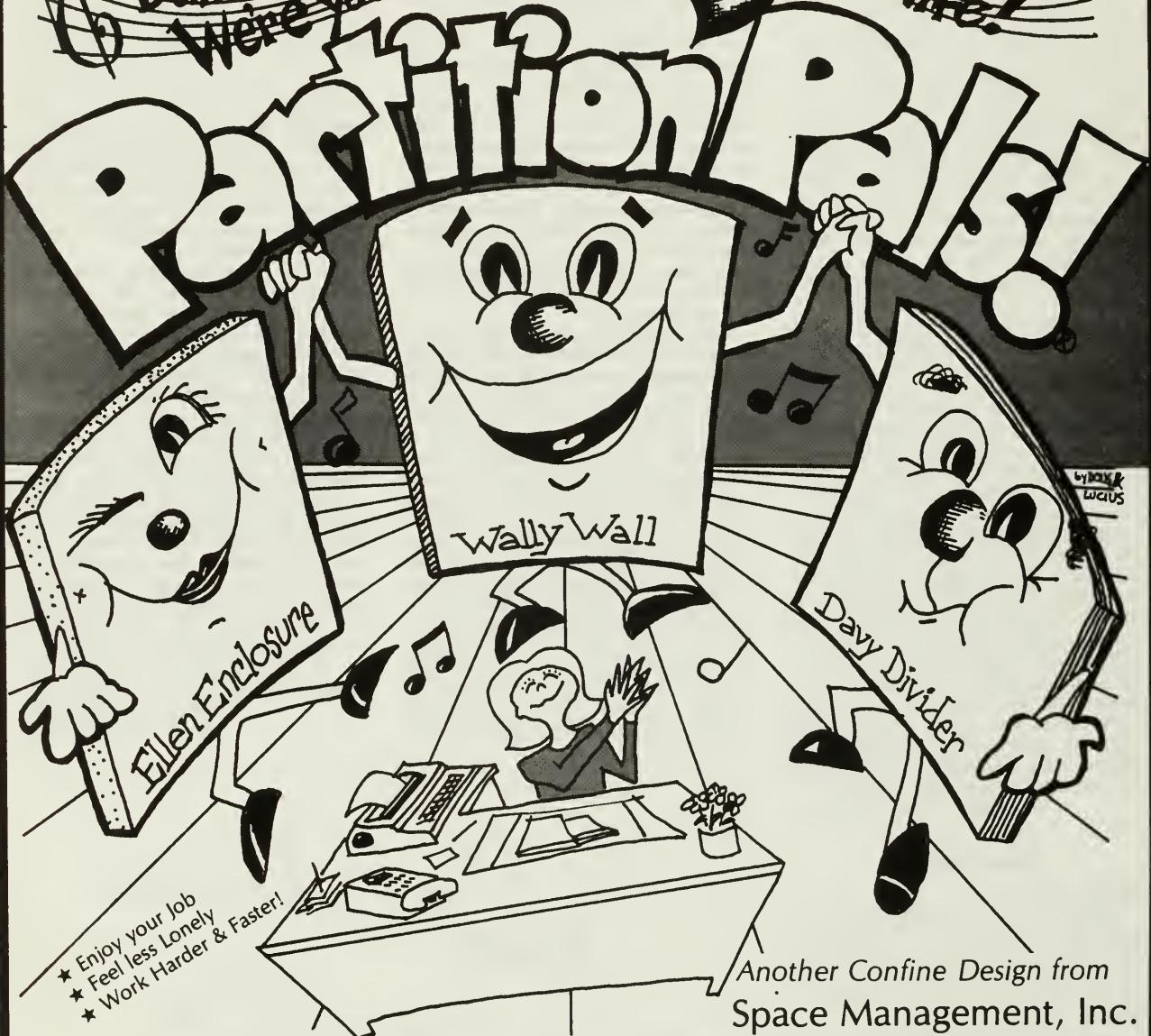
Onward, Obiter Dictum  
Folsom Prison, California



GRAPHIC: I.B. NELSON

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# *Lonely Trails, Itinerant Cultures*

# Work's Diminishing Connections

**A**merica's electronics industry cultivates the fabric cubicle partition. Rising to the height of stockyard pens, the partitions, in all shapes and colors, intrude nearly everywhere. They connect and isolate circuit-board assemblers, shipping clerks, systems programmers, and marketing analysts. Alongside windows, even managers and 'vice-presidents sequester themselves in the fabric corrals.

Enclosing assembler and executive alike, the partitions confer the appearance of social similarity, suggest the unity of entrepreneurial purpose. But the impermanence of the partition design—its quick assembly and disassembly—reveals deeper meaning. Expanding and contracting with the fortunes of each company, the partitions shape the fragile edifice of Silicon Valley. They are an emblem for the transience of its workers as well as the profound loneliness of its work.

The industry has adapted the partitions and those who work within them to its volatile project—making new technologies for which there often is neither precedent nor market. Small or large, the electronics firm must cope with disruptive forces: instant success, ill-fated market debuts, compressed development schedules, sudden product obsolescence, unexpected and unrelenting competition, unforeseen 'bugs' and disloyal financial sponsors. These erratic forces prompt each firm to insist on flexible constellations of workers and managers—in effect, to pass on its instability to the labor market.

Electronics employers are fickle. They fire and hire to automate a labor-process here, relocate a plant there, work overtime on a product today, cancel or postpone it in favor of another product tomorrow. It is as if America's largest manufacturing industry, after decades of development, still cannot make up its mind what, exactly, it will make, how and where it will make it, or whether it is in it for the long run. This is why electronics firms favor the impermanence of the cubicle partitions.

## VOLATILE CAPITAL, TRANSIENT LABOR

The volatility of electronics capital is in step with the lurching rhythms of contemporary capitalism. The industry came of age during the changeover of the U.S. economy from manufacturing to service-based industries, especially to retail sales and financial services. Electronics firms reflect this shift, since the industry's products have made it possible.

An abiding design objective

**"For better or worse, a group of workers is no longer 'stuck' with each other at a workplace year in, year out. Instead, a wandering occupational itinerary fragments and truncates shared experience."**

of electronics technology—ever faster data transmission—mirrors the priorities of an economy that now enlarges itself by accelerating the circulation of capital, rather than by manufacturing it anew. Or so it seems. After the electronics industry itself, and the military, the swelling “industries” of retail sales, fast-food, financial, insurance, banking, brokerage, and business services absorb most new U.S.-made computer products. In fact, these non-manufacturing enterprises are among the fastest growing parts of the civilian economy<sup>3</sup>. Their growth depends largely on the speed with which they provide their services. Brokerage firms attract more business by allowing clients on-line access to market trading.

Banks make float-profit by processing outstanding checks and notes faster. Corporations enlarge “idle” cash assets via rapid currency and portfolio transfers. Restaurant chains boost sales by delivering fast food faster during peak hours. So profitable, and thus crucial, is the demand for faster computer processing that electronics products now become rapidly obsolete. Electronics firms used to make products with average market lifetimes of five years. As of late 1986, it was 1.5 years and shrinking. This makes the entrepreneur wary. His product lines—and his assembly lines—are always changing.

We think of Silicon Valley as a manufacturing center. As it exports more and

more of its manufacturing jobs offshore, however, much of Silicon Valley has come to resemble a sprawling product design-and-development service for Japanese, Korean, and other Asian-based manufacturing concerns. In 1984, managers (13%) and salaried professional and technical workers (43%) accounted for 56% of the Valley's high tech workforce, while production workers accounted for 30%. This is lopsided compared with the 70% figure for production workers in U.S. manufacturing at large. The relatively fixed, and thus long-term, investment required for domestic manufacturing is not favored in the boardrooms of the venture capital concerns and conglomerates that increasingly control the Valley's electronics industry and its entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurial spirit that is widely believed to animate Silicon Valley is really an incarnation of the gambler's lust that has seized the American economy.

The short-sighted quest of its financial sponsors and the fluctuations of its markets make the electronics business inherently unstable. Like the nervous contestants in a vaudeville amateur show, electronics entrepreneurs must line up for the chance to make their sponsors' money dance. In place of the hook that yanks ill-starred performers from the stage, a standard clause in a startup contract allows those who provide the capital to fire the startup firm's president at any time, for any reason. According to an ongoing Silicon Valley survey, less than one in four firms survive the rigors of startup—the rest either fail or are “acquired.”

Instability imbues the computer-building workplace with an urgency that outsiders interpret as the inspired effort about which so much has been written. There are sublime moments of excitement, of unity between workers and their work. But it is the brief excitement of frenzied effort, the soldierly unity of a military campaign. Volatile circumstances create and dissolve, more than sustain, the fabled communities of work in Silicon Valley. Suddenly or gradually, temporarily or permanently, the firm's growth slackens, the market evolves away from its products, the work subsides, and the workers are reassigned or withdrawn from the front. The ephemeral fabric partition ebbs and flows while, expandable and expendable, the itinerant worker comes and goes.

Following the trails blazed by microelectronics capital, the itinerant worker travels from one company to another, finding work where it can be had and working fiercely until a layoff or another job looms. The itinerant worker spans the occupational gamut from microchip fab operator to systems analyst, from assembler to engineer. The itinerant's working conditions, status, pay, and workday culture vary widely too. His or her immediate guises include the temporary worker, the immi-

## WORKING TO LIVE OR LIVING TO WORK???

Why have I declined full-time employment? I enjoy the flexibility. I chose to hire on as a supplemental, a.k.a. part-time employee, for a large computer company in Silicon Valley three years ago. During that time I have been offered full time employment four times and have declined. I work 4 days a week, choose the hours I want to work, and get paid a handsome hourly wage. Feeling like I've been in a pressure cooker for four days a week, I need that extra day off to keep my sanity. I decided some years ago not to “live for work” but to “work to live.” Everyone needs to strike a balance between their work lives and their personal lives and I'm no exception.

Unlike a temp, a supplemental employee is considered part of the company by fellow workers and management. I can participate in company activities (i.e.: picnics, employee discount club, Christmas dinner and dance), if I choose. With the exception of dental benefits and sick leave I receive the same benefits as full time employees.

I am in an enviable position. Full-time employees who do the same job as I do are salaried employees, which means that they do not receive overtime pay. They work whatever hours it takes to get the job done. In most cases full-time employees do not receive “comp time” (days off in lieu of working extra hours) but because I am a supplemental employee, the company has to pay me for every hour I work. During peak periods that could mean fifty hours a week (10 hours of which are time-and-a-half) or in slow times twenty-four hours a week. Fortunately, I usually work twenty-eight to thirty hours a week. Longer weeks tend to

make me grumpy.

During a recent, massive lay-off at my company, people with over fifteen years experience there were laid off while many supplemental employees like myself were kept on. Why?

Supplemental employees traditionally were hired directly by the company to accommodate additional work required during peak periods to “supplement” the work force. The official intent is to lay off supplementals or reduce their hours during slow times but this is mythology.

The corporate mentality is to keep only those employees who are competent, diligent, cooperative, have more than one job skill and are willing to do whatever is asked of them (sound like Superman?). If a part-time employee fits the bill, all the better. The company gets more “bang for the buck,” meaning you pay them only for the “hours they work” and the benefits are cheaper too.

The fact is that the U.S. economy is being transformed by the widespread and growing use of part-time employees. According to a report released by the Joint Economic Committee of Congress on December 19, 1986, “nearly all new jobs created between 1979 and 1984 in the U.S. paid less than \$7,000 annually, while the number of jobs paying \$28,000 or more fell.” The report explained the prevalence of low paying jobs by citing disproportionate increases in part time work, including the redesign of full time jobs into part-time jobs.

Part-time work is on the agenda. What will become of those who need a full-time income in the growing part-time labor market?

Emily Post-It

grant worker, even the skilled "professional." Many are likely to quit, transfer, or be laid off within a year or two—provided their department, division, or company lasts that long. Those who last longer watch a revolving door of new workers arriving and old ones exiting.

Doris is a single, 37-year-old working mother who grew up in Silicon Valley. In twenty years, Doris has worked as a circuit board assembler and production expediter in eight jobs with half a dozen Silicon Valley electronics firms. Though her Fortune-500 employers have been the most stable <sup>10</sup>, Doris has been laid off twice, fired once, and has collected unemployment three times. (She qualifies for, but declines, welfare assistance.) Her longest stint at one job lasted nearly four years, her shortest, several weeks. The day after our interview, she lost her most recent job, which had lasted nine months. Doris is an itinerant worker.

Victor is an itinerant worker, too. Victor is a single 30-year-old systems programmer who moved to Silicon Valley from New York in 1980. Victor's first electronics employer "flew me out to California and shipped my car in a big moving van." Since then, according to Victor, "it's been one new company to get in bed with after another." In less than seven years, Victor has held four jobs. Unlike Doris, he has never been laid off or fired. Instead, he has carefully picked his next job on the basis of his technical interest in the projects each offered. Victor's interest in his current project is waning, and so he contemplates his next move.

As with Doris and Victor, expendability affects the forms a worker's transience assumes; in Silicon Valley, the Dorises are laid off much more often than the Victors. Programmers' and engineers' career-hopping is more likely voluntary—planned to minimize financial and emotional trauma. When salaried workers move on, it is typically through a web of "professional friends," a far-flung network of instrumental acquaintances who are periodically consulted and polled for access to a new job. Firms encourage the networks (which sometimes include wage workers), offering bonuses to employees who bring new workers "on board."

The networks, and the cavalcade of changing jobs, breed disinterest in the more traditional connections between workers. For better or for worse, a group of workers is no longer "stuck" with each other at a workplace year in, year out. Instead, a wandering occupational itinerary fragments and truncates shared experience. In the shifting soil of short-lived employment, the itinerant worker's roots must be shallow, retractable.

When I asked Doris if she kept up with workers from previous jobs, she was mildly surprised by my question. "Not really," she replied, adding that she would occa-



GRAPHIC: RL TRIPP

## "Hey Frank, this one's busted. Why don'cha send to stock for a new one?"

sionally get a call from a former fellow worker. Regarding her current workplace, she complained that "I have no friends." She didn't really mingle much with workers during nonwork hours because she was so busy. Victor is less isolated from past and present workmates, though he recalls that at two of his four jobs, he did not mix socially. Work cultures separate Doris, a wage worker, from Victor, a salaried professional, but their occupational transience imparts a common perspective of detachment from the workplace and its circle of acquaintances, neither of which, after all, they can take with them to their next job.

Itinerant workers in the electronics industry are distinct from migrant farm workers who travel together from job to job, whose work follows predictable seasonal rhythms, and who speak and act as a community more or less conscious of itself. The modern itinerant worker may be fired in groups, but does not travel, find work, live, or act with others as part of a community, despite sharing similar burdens. The burdens are many and not strictly peculiar to Silicon Valley: the frequent, unsettling motion in and out of work, the deprivations of prolonged overtime; the anxiety of little-known workplace dangers; the shocking cost of housing; the fatigue of withering commutes to work, to childcare centers, to shopping centers; and the stress of juggling it all. The itinerant tends to perceive these burdens less as the common problems of a group of workers, and more as individual dilemmas

to be ignored or suffered as best as one can before moving on. Work's larger purposes—if one can still speak without cynicism of its capacity to provide for a sense of connection and contribution to society, for satisfying and healthful lives outside of work, even for security upon retirement—these purposes recede before the immediate prospects of finding work and once found, before the press of work's daily demands.

Job turnover rates—the percentage of full-time employees who resign or transfer each year—provide a glimpse of the furious labor migration within the electronics industry. In 1980, the American Electronics Association (AEA) surveyed its (roughly) one thousand member firms and reported an industry average 26% turnover rate <sup>11</sup>—twice the national 13.2% turnover rate <sup>12</sup>. The following year, a Dun's Review report put the Valley's turnover rate at over 30%. Engineers, it was said, were "averaging a mere two years at any one company."<sup>13</sup>

The turnover estimates are based on nonexhaustive surveys, and should be taken with the precautions that all statistics require. But the numbers suggested a pattern: workers were not staying long at the new jobs they were finding in the electronics industry. This dubious job security casts doubt on the electronics industry's heralded role as a refuge from Rustbelt unemployment.

The electronics industry turnover rates have slackened, according to the AEA. Thus, 1985 yielded the lowest-ever industry turnover rate—just under 18% (still above the national average).<sup>14</sup> But the apparent trend toward employment stability is bogus. The turnover rates exclude layoffs, and layoffs have made frequent copy in business columns during the open-ended electronics recession of the 80s.

If job turnover rates establish the presence of itinerant workers, layoffs augment their number. Just how much so is difficult to say with certainty. Layoffs may or may not be permanent, and are not always announced (for every five publicly disclosed layoffs, a sixth layoff probably occurs behind closed doors).<sup>15</sup> IBM for years has hidden layoffs by its refinement of intimidating techniques aimed at reducing its permanent workforce: downgrading employees, selectively applying performance standards, and demanding frequent or unpalatable transfers. "There's a lot of turnover," according to an IBM San Jose production worker, who added that workers who fall from grace with their superiors are "pushed" into resigning when high-production swings wind down.

Excluding the large military contractors, Silicon Valley saw a loss of at least 5% to 7% of its electronics industry jobs from spring 1985 through autumn 1986, according to employment surveys.<sup>16</sup> A comparable job loss occurred throughout

the industry. (It is not known how many of these jobs were transferred offshore). To these statistical casualties must be added the thousands of early retirements—10,000 at IBM alone, beginning in late 1986—the periodic furloughs<sup>17</sup>, and the forced unpaid “vacation” days, all of which burdened electronics jobs with instability.

Taken together, turnovers and layoffs probably separate at least a quarter of the electronics industry's permanent workforce, or almost one out of every four workers, from their jobs each year. But even this calculation, which is above the national average, is wanting. It excludes the outside temporary worker and the legions of undocumented immigrant workers with which the electronics firms supplement their payrolls. The temporary and the undocumented immigrant worker constitute the most underprivileged substrata of the itinerant workforce and illustrate the separateness of transient cultures. It is worth considering their lot in some detail.

#### PERMANENT TEMPORARY WORKERS?

Emerging in Silicon Valley, perhaps with more intensity than anywhere else, is the *deployment of temporary workers as a substitute for permanent workers*. “When you're dealing with volatile industries like semiconductors and electronics,” explained the head of the Valley's temporary agency trade group, “the role of the temporary has changed to a detached workforce actually planned for by personnel departments.” A Silicon Valley worker is more than three times as likely to be a temporary worker than elsewhere; within the computer-building and related industries, this figure rises. “The general consensus for a lot of high-tech companies is to have 10 to 15 percent of their labor force temporary,” according to a Valley agency spokesperson. One computer maker, Convergent Technologies, uses temporaries for nearly 30% of its work force. The temp's assignments include the traditional ones of filling in for full-time clerical/secretarial workers on vacation or sick leave. But far more often, “temps” are electronics assemblers and other production workers as well as programmers, accountants, technical illustrators and writers<sup>18</sup>. The assignments can last weeks or months, but increasingly are open ended in accord with the inconstant demands of the computer corporation.

Permanent workers may be dragooned by their employer into the ranks of impermanence. In a practice known as “employee leasing,” Corvus, a computer-storage firm, fired its technical writers and then offered to “rehire” several of the now jobless ex-employees at lower expense as temporary workers<sup>19</sup>. Other firms less systematically displace permanent employees with part-time staff. (See “Working to Live or Living to Work?” page 12)

Startup computer companies, liable to expand wildly but tentative about their

future, are a natural employer for the easily-riddanced temporary worker, who supplements a core of dedicated “founder” workers. But large, mature computer corporations also rely heavily on temporary workers as well as “supplemental” workers—part-time personnel hired directly by the employer. Hewlett-Packard, IBM, and Control Data Corporation are among the largest users of temporary and supplemental workers. H-P maintains its own temporary agency and also contracts with nearly a dozen outside agencies, spending millions to keep temporary workers on its payroll, mainly for production and clerical work, but also for programming, technical writing, and other esoterically skilled work. The rationale? When there is a slowdown, as one agent put it, “you don't have those layoffs that put you on the front page”—merely the orderly and predictable release of temporary workers. For example, in autumn, 1985, IBM-San Jose, according to a full-time production worker, quietly laid off “several hundred” supplementals.

These unannounced dismissals are no less tragic for going untallied in local and national media, and for eluding those who calculate official joblessness; on-again, off-again temp workers cannot always petition successfully for unemployment compensation or simply do not bother. The statistical fictions of Reagan's Department of Labor have been compounded by both IBM and H-P's claims of “never having a layoff anywhere,” since the hundreds of temporary and supplemental workers each employs and dismisses every year are not, strictly speaking employees, and thus are not counted by these clever firms as layoffs.

The advantages of employing temporary help are not reducible merely to greater labor flexibility. As the executive president of the National Association of Temporary Services, speaking of the booming Silicon Valley temporary market, put it, the temp “provides a buffer zone” to a company's full-time workers, “shield[ing] them from the ups and downs” of the economy. This observation, really a recommendation, is saturated with the worst paternalism, but it also locates the temp worker in an economic class that is well beneath that of the permanent worker.

The temp's pay and benefits, with which the agencies are notoriously stingy, are far less than that of nontemporary workers performing similar work. The economics are straightforward (see “From Inside the Beast—Temporarily,” this issue). The contrast in pay and benefits suggests the privileged culture in which the “permanent” worker is steeped relative to the temp.<sup>20</sup>

The temp's relative power and control over a job is also badly compromised. Some workers envy the temp's mobility and detachment. With few exceptions, however, the temp is viewed by management and workers alike as a mercenary

whose allegiance to the company, and thus to the job, is actively suspect. No amount of reassurance and advertising by the larger temp agencies seem to have changed this prejudice. There is a conceit regarding the temporary worker, as if this status reflected one's inability to hold down permanent work, rather than the simple scarcity of such work. In consequence, the temp suffers special indignities. As a rule, the temp is hired to do the worst (i.e., most boring, repetitive, tedious, or physically demanding) jobs on the slowest, clunkiest equipment, under the least comfortable conditions. Thus situated, temps are expected to perform to the exaggerated standards advertised by their agencies and to exude the unctuousness of the cheerful subordinate. To make matters worse, the temp is often exempted from informal work rules and rituals, such as the permanent worker's longer lunch breaks, late morning arrivals, early Friday afternoon departures, and extended breaks. Moreover, the temp may be an unwelcome guest at the usual gossip and kaffee klatsches. This is the special “detachment” of the temporary worker, whose natural allies, fellow workers, are often unapproachable at first.

The infringement of the temporary worker's rights is perhaps the greatest injustice. For instance, in a practice known as “payrolling,” employers may screen prospective permanent employees sent to them by a temp agency. As one employer put it, payrolling “allow[s] us to test someone in place of a probationary period.” Payrolling may or may not lead to a permanent job for the temp. The important difference is that firms can dismiss temporary workers without even the minimal notice or explanation given fired probationary workers. As it is, employers are discouraged from hiring on the temp by the substantial “release” fees charged by the temp's agent.

“Payrolled” or not, when problems do emerge, temps cannot, according to many agencies' policies, deal directly with an on-site manager. Instead, the temporary worker must appeal to the good graces of the temporary agent to represent him or her in a dispute with the agency's “client.” Without so much as an exit interview, fired temps may find out only that “there were problems” or that their performance was “unprofessional,” generalities that are hard to defend against. Nor are temp agencies reliable defenders of their employees, since the employees are usually easily replaced, and the agencies are predisposed to accept the firm's version of things. The firm is a potentially greater and certainly more stable source of income for the agent than the offending temporary worker.

Some observers, especially those riding the waves and charting the trends of the future, put the best face on the emergence of temporary workers, depicting them as

an innovative and happy medium for labor and capital<sup>21</sup>. Here it is imagined that temporary work fulfills the avocational aspirations of students, retirees, the unemployed-in-between-jobs, and others who scorn permanent work. There's no denying that impermanent and part-time work is well-suited to many schedules. But the sanguine appraisals apply mainly, I suspect, to the minority of well-paid, highly-skilled temps. This is small consolation for the majority of disenfranchised temporary workers whose ill-paid and unstable assignments more accurately reflect the unilaterally determined needs of increasingly volatile capital.

The final tragedy is the temporary worker's isolation not only from the permanent worker, but also from other temps, who are freshly dispersed with every assignment. No one is better suited to ameliorate the temp's abused status than temp workers themselves. Within this fragmented itinerant culture, there is great potential, but little occasion, for solidarity. Divided, they cope.

In the tumult of the electronics industry's widely varying fortunes, as well as the tentative atmosphere of the economy at

large, the temporary agency promises to reduce production costs and is therefore a growth industry. This promise is secured by the isolation of the temp worker from mainstream work cultures.

#### UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS: HERE TODAY...

The least publicly acknowledged itinerant culture is that of the undocumented immigrant<sup>22</sup>. No one knows with certainty how many undocumented workers reside and work in Silicon Valley, which officially hosts 320,000 Hispanics and thousands more Taiwanese, Vietnamese, and Filipinos. But in the *barrios* of East San Jose, counterfeit "green cards"—actually white, with red and blue printing—are available for \$50-\$250, some boasting the secret codes of the genuine article.

Biased estimates abound. In 1984, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) opened a special branch office in Silicon Valley, claiming that 25% of the workforce—nearly 200,000 workers—were there illegally, that more were on the way, and that it was high time something was done about it. This was a staggering calculation and a threat of wholesale in-

quisition; both were inflated, probably deliberately. A year later, the *Wall Street Journal* put the numbers slightly lower, between 10% and 20%<sup>23</sup>. But by then, the INS, as it has nearly everywhere, had dashed its inquisitional designs. Instead, it had capitulated to a familiar bloc of Sunbelt political and corporate interests who traffic in what the *Journal* calls the "cheap, docile, and abundant" undocumented worker. The traffic continues, pushing, as it does, the terms of and prices in the United States labor market down toward the subsistence levels of the Third World.

Since the early 1970s, the U.S. semiconductor and electronics firms have been among the biggest employers of Third World labor in the U.S. and abroad. By the mid-1970s, for example, the five largest chip makers collectively had over 60 production facilities abroad—more than these firms maintained in the United States<sup>24</sup>. Many a firm has shifted work from Sunnyvale to Manila as the fidgeting of cost accountants dictated. Former computer-game *paterfamilias* Atari relocated its entire production facilities from the Valley to El Paso, Texas, and then to Hong Kong



and Taiwan; before it was through, 4,000 Valley workers were permanently disengaged from their Atari jobs. Through such arrangements, North and South, East and West are meeting, and not only on the payrolls of the global computer-building firms. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the bargain basement of the itinerant labor market in Silicon Valley—the life of the undocumented immigrant worker.

My most frequent contact with undocumented workers came while I was a temporary clerk making pickups and deliveries for an audio/video computer maker that subcontracted work to metal shops in Silicon Valley. Inside one of the shops—a dirt-floor quonset hut in Santa Clara—were Hispanic workers in rubber boots, gloves, and aprons—and without respirator masks. They moved about quickly, stoking fires beneath vats of chemicals, climbing up and down the jury-built platforms which gave access to the vats. Some of the vats boiled; others, untouched by the fires, yielded the smoke of chemical reaction. The first time I delivered there, the workers regarded me suspiciously. They may have taken my tie, twill slacks, and sunglasses for the accoutrements of *La Migra* travelling incognito. Then, after my pick-ups and deliveries at the metal shop became a commonplace, their suspicion gave way to silent grinning salutations.

Into the vats the workers dipped the unfinished alloy chassis panels, nuts, and screws I would drop off from the digital camera factory. The foul metallic odors made me want to hold my breath. The bulb-shaped fans twirling slowly on the roof provided little ventilation. After I stopped making deliveries there, someone in a position to know confirmed my suspicions: most of the metal shop employees were undocumented workers. I wondered how much they were daunted by their "alien" status from speaking out against the odors.

Much of Silicon Valley, as well as huge swaths of the American Southwest, have become a *de facto* Export Processing Zone (EPZ)—an entrepreneurial no-man's land where the civilized pretensions of the above-ground labor market are checked at the shop door. In EPZs in Malaysia and the Philippines, or in the *maquiladoras* along the Mexican-U.S. border, an electronics firm escapes taxes, enjoys the presumption of abridged labor organizing and safety precautions, and employs young,

mainly female, first-time wage workers for as little as 70 cents an hour. In the United States, by informal decree of the INS, the same firm, or its subcontractors, receives similar advantages. In the Valley, the middling-to-small shops of metal plating, printed circuit board assembly, landscaping and janitorial service muster the undocumented worker for \$2.50 an hour or lower. Even the *Journal* noted that "10,000 illegals [are] estimated to be manufacturing printed circuit boards in Silicon Valley, often at below the minimum wage." Without them, the *Journal* speculated, the local economy "might collapse."

The parallels between the foreign EPZs and the underground neo-serfdoms being carved out in the Valley run long and deep. For speaking out against workplace dangers, company-store markups, or a foreman's sexual advances in the Philippines, a worker risks both current job and general blacklisting within the EPZ. Not only can dissident undocumented workers in Silicon Valley be summarily fired; they must also be wary of the dogs, handcuffs, and searches of immigration police agents. At intervals dictated by the complex politics of immigrant labor, these agents may suddenly round up hundreds of hapless workers, preventively detain them, and send many of them to the unfriendly or indifferent governments of their homelands. The raid, like the blacklist, severs the workplace connections to the immigrant's potentially most helpful companions—resident fellow workers. Even the rumor of a raid can result in preemptive withdrawal from one's job so as to avoid arrest.

The temp's workplace rights and conditions are shabby, confined by once-removed ties to the labor market; the underground immigrant electronics worker's rights are nonexistent and workplace conditions generally much worse. This is despite the frequent deduction of worker's compensation, job disability and unemployment contributions from the immigrant's pay—for benefits he and she will never see. As one employer put it, "Whenever there's an accident..., the Chicano [Mexican-American] will stay home and ask for worker's compensation. The Mexicans, they work."

Undocumented immigrant workers are so important to the Valley's electronics-based economy as to be tolerated (but only in their current wretched status) by a revealing alliance of interests. During its first week of business in 1984, the San Jose INS raided several electronics workplaces. San Jose City officials, sensitive to the importance of "illegals" to the local economy, adopted a resolution against "the unwarranted disruption of the business community" as well as the affront to resident Chicano workers being shaken down by indiscriminating INS agents. The City Attorney explored means to prevent the raids. The Police Chief instructed his min-

ions not to cooperate with raiding INS agents. Within months, a Federal Judge issued a local injunction against the open-ended INS raids, ordering its agents to notify employers or to describe to them each suspect before a raid. Chastised, the INS has since relented, but not before installing a resident alien database against which employers can check the validity of workers' "green cards." Under this *pas laissez faire*, employers decide when and against which employees to apply INS heat; when INS agents come calling, the employer can schedule raids to coincide with a week's "vacation" for their docile undocumented workers—or hand over the names of troublemakers.

It is too early to discern the impact of the new immigration rules, which are being gradually introduced. The laws appear to offer hope to those immigrants both willing and able to provide proof of their residency. Most, I suspect, will remain skeptical. National Semiconductor workers tell the story of their employer's promise of diplomatic and legal assistance to its immigrant employees. When some of the latter then revealed their improper documents, National Semi ordered them to provide proof of legal status within 72 hours. In the doldrums of a sales slump, National Semi fired those who couldn't produce appropriate visas and then escaped liability for unemployment compensation claims<sub>25</sub>.

In the shadow of unofficial sanction, little light is shed on undocumented immigrant workers' jobs. No one, save the odd underfunded legal defense fund or parish food kitchen, ventures to tally their layoffs, injuries, illnesses, or wages. Stuck in subcontracting electronics shops or even smaller cottage-type operations, undocumented immigrant workers are physically, as well as culturally, removed from the legal workforce. Without legal status, without a voice, and without the active sympathy and support of resident workers, they remain vulnerable in the worst ways. Silicon Valley indeed might "collapse" without them, but their plight remains hidden, and they are ill-placed to help themselves.

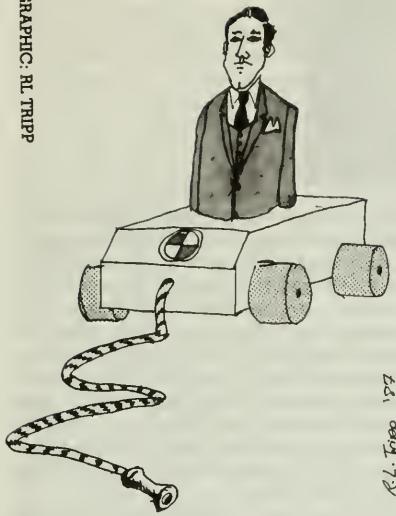
#### THE DIMINISHING CONNECTIONS

The urge to quantify the itinerant worker phenomenon is difficult to resist. But lumping the temporary and undocumented workers together with the previously estimated 25% of workers separated from their jobs each year by turnover and layoffs is ill-advised, even as an approximation. Firms that employ undocumented workers do not always employ temps, the former being an even cheaper substitute for the latter. Companies that "lease" temps for 30% of their workforce are likely to issue fewer permanent-employee layoffs. Moreover, the motivations that impel workers along an occupational itinerary are as varied as the itineraries

#### Temporarily Poetry

—Beauty's Only Skin Deep  
Here she is  
there she goes  
Missed America.

*Linda Thomas*



## Yuppus Sociomobilus

themselves. Many workers attach a coherence to their workplace transience, regarding job changes as the logical steps of an unfolding career. Salaried professional employees with skills in high demand can do so plausibly; the less-skilled production worker cannot.

What can be said is that transient cultures saturate the electronics industry, creating an atmosphere of impermanence among its workforce. That electronics is now our largest manufacturing employer may be prophetic. Thanks in large part to the electronics industry, job descriptions in the 80s read like recipes for workplace transience.

Electronics products play a crucial role in the growth of service-based industries that offer low-wage, part-time jobs as well as automation technologies that reduce the manufacturing workforce. According to a recent Joint Economic Committee of Congress study by Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison,<sup>26</sup> more than half of all new jobs are paying less than \$7000 per year, a "disproportionate" number are part time, and, we can safely infer, most are unchallenging to jobholders and vulnerable to automation. These are the conditions that favor workplace transience, as the rising national job turnover rates and layoffs tend to confirm.

Some workers, even in Silicon Valley, manage to stay on at firms year after year. But permanent workers cannot escape the consequences of a transient workforce around them. If their fellow workers are forever shifting, the complexion of their departments, shops, or labs can change

significantly within one to three years. The contagion of transience may not infect every worker, but, as with the quarantined survivors in Camus' *The Plague*, life is not the same for those who remain.

The itinerant worker is as restless as the microelectronics industry is volatile. But the restlessness is disturbing, the mobility—even by American standards—is dizzying. Like the American tourist attempting to "see" Europe in two weeks, the itinerant retains little more than passing interest in the changing scenery of workplace and fellow workers.

Itinerant workers are, by tenure, less informed about a specific shop or office, its management, its labor relations, its problems, its history. By that measure, itinerants are less effective in speaking out with the authority of experience on workplace problems. It is perhaps too early to pronounce with certainty, but the itinerant perspective of a large and growing proportion of workers probably reduces pressure on the firm to correct problems, to invest in and implement safety procedures, to chastise or remove offensive managers. This might help explain why itinerant workers have proven elusive targets for electronics industry union organizing, such as it has been (see PW 16 "Unions? In Silicon Valley?")

Transience clearly affects the forms employee resistance assumes. When management policies inspire employee resistance, its collective character is often preempted or aborted in favor of individual measures. For example, at a computer graphics company in the Valley, several technical writers, including myself, quit as a result of an overbearing manager. The departures were staggered, and came after the founding of a quasi-organized rebellion against the manager's crude wielding of authority. The failure reflected our inexperience in collective resistance, but also the less troublesome option of finding another job while biding our time as best we could. This escape route was conditioned by the availability of jobs but also by a shared itinerant perspective: none of us had planned on staying with this company. No one *plans* on staying with an electronics company indefinitely, even when one would like to do so.

Whether our jobs are taken from us or whether we leave them voluntarily, we may or may not improve our lots by finding work elsewhere. But by looking elsewhere, we are less and less likely to address work problems collectively, an option that is fading from the realm of the familiar and feasible. It's not that collective undertakings are spurned, but more that they're difficult to imagine while in the flow of an itinerant culture. Transience is difficult to share.

—by Dennis Hayes

### Notes:

1. According to an American Electronics Association

report, approximately 2.5 million people work in the electronics industry, making it the largest manufacturing sector in the U.S. *Wall Street Journal*, 9/3/86.

2. Only 15% of the U.S. microchip market "is geared to consumer products (compared to 55% of Japanese semiconductor sales)." Gordon & Kimball, p. 19, 1985. A comparable proportion exists for most other made-in-U.S.A. electronics, whose largest single market (\$56 billion, or about 25% of total electronics sales) is military, with the business markets cited next. *WSJ* 9/3/86.

3. "The service sector (including trade, finance, insurance, real estate, services and government) accounted for 56.7% of total U.S. employment in 1940. By 1960, the figure had jumped to 62.3% and then to 71.5% in 1980. In contrast, goods-producing employment (including mining, manufacturing, and construction) shrank from 43.3% in 1940, to 37.7% in 1960, and then to 28.5% in 1980." McCrate, Elaine. "Is it Trickling Down?" *Economic Resources for the People*, 1986.

4. Dataquest, Silicon Valley Research Group Conference, University of California—Santa Cruz, October 1986.

5. "The production labor force, which comprised 60% of all electronics jobs in 1965, had declined to under one-half of all electronics employment by 1984."—Gordon, R. & L.M. Kimball, "High Technology, Employment & The Challenges to Education." Conference on Job Creation, Innovation, & New Technologies, Brussels, p. 25 9/2-5/85.

6. Gordon & Kimball, *ibid*, p. 25, 1985.

7. Gordon & Kimball, *ibid*, p. 15-16, 1985.

8. Rose, F. "In the Grip" *Esquire* February, 1985.

9. Bruno, A., J. Leidecker, & J. Harder "Why Firms Fail: Patterns of Discontinuance Among Silicon Valley High-Technology Firms" University of Santa Clara, October, 1985.

10. Teledyne Microwave, Eaton Corporation, Applied Technology, Ampex, Memorex, and Varian Associates. 11. AEA Press Release.

12. Bureau of National Affairs, Washington, D.C.

13. Murray, Thomas J. "Silicon Valley Faces Up to the People's Crunch." *Dun's Review* July 1981.

14. The national turnover rate, as compiled by the BNA, has been rising—to 16.8% in 1985. This suggests a trend toward greater workplace transience in industry at large.

15. The impact of layoffs is obscured further by the simultaneous creation of new electronics jobs. For example, a Silicon Valley newspaper survey found that between January, 1983 and March, 1985, 48 high-tech firms laid off 10,000 workers while employment—including military electronics work—grew by 36,000.

16. Annual Planning Information, San Jose Metropolitan Statistical Area 1986-87, California Employment Development Dept.

17. Wilson, Rand et. al. "Do Unions Have a Future in High Technology?" *Technology Review*, October 1986.

18. According to Manpower's Silicon Valley branches—one of the largest—45% of its temps are office workers, 23% are production workers, and 29% are "specialized" technical workers such as engineers and technicians. Interview, 1986.

19. This anecdote was recounted at a National Writers Union, Local 3, meeting in Silicon Valley, 1986. A Corvus spokesperson would neither deny nor confirm the story.

20. By 1986, the largest temp agency in the world, Manpower, offered life/health benefits, paid holidays, and vacation pay. But, according to a Silicon Valley Manpower spokesperson, "the vast majority of temporaries never use benefits because they don't stay with us long enough." For example, to qualify for one week's vacation pay, a Manpower temp must "have worked 1500 hours during the preceding 12-month period," i.e., nearly full time.

21. Toffler, A. *The Third Wave*, Morrow, 1980.

22. At a conference held by the Silicon Valley Research Group/UC Santa Cruz, 10/24-25/86, panels presented smatterings of empirical workforce sociology, but not a smidgen of research on the traffic in underground immigrant labor.

23. Other estimates, such as a recent one by *San Francisco Chronicle* reporters, put the total Bay Area undocumented figure "between 150,000 and 300,000" DelVecchio, R. and D. Garcia "Immigration Law is Changing U.S." 1/26/87.

24. Keller, J.F. The Division of Labor In Electronics. (1981) *Women and the International Division of Labor*. Nash, J. & M.P. Fernandez-Kelly eds. State University of New York Press, 1983.

25. Wilson, R. *ibid*, 1986.

26. Bluestone, B. and B. Harrison. Joint Economic Committee of Congress, December 9, 1986.



# A Teaching Temp Talks Back

I work as a part-time instructor at a San Francisco Bay Area community college. The California public university system, which includes universities, state universities and community colleges, was designed in the 1960s (when there was lots of money kicking around) to enable any young Californian who wanted one to get a college degree, regardless of economic level. I myself was a product of the education boom. Thanks to the largesse of financial aid, I armed myself (along with the rest of the hordes) with my liberal arts degree, ready to tackle the world. I'm still tethered to the public university system, but now I'm looking at it from the inside as an employee, and, along with my fellow part-time instructors, watching it disintegrate.

Nowhere do you see the insidious undoing of the promise of equal opportunity as in the current California community college system. With the passage of the tax-cutting Proposition 13 and the election of a short-sighted, "bottom-line" governor, the California community colleges had begun their slow decline. Government funds have been reduced to a trickle over the last few years. Administrators moan and groan over the restrictions imposed on them. Classes have been cut. Tuition is raised yearly. Attendance is down. Low-income teenagers have proven to be a completely expendable commodity in the highly competitive, high-tech job market of the 1980s, and the California system of education has remorselessly abandoned them.

The university system is also abandoning the very graduates it spawned—the new crop of mainly extraneous teachers in the arts, humanities and social sciences. In the community colleges, the teaching profession is slowly but surely going the route of two-tiered polarization, just like

the thousands of traditional, skilled jobs that are currently being degraded. On the top, you have the twenty-year veterans protected by the American Federation of Teachers and an antiquated tenure system in which incompetence, egotism and banality unfortunately run rampant. On the bottom, you have people like me—people who want to teach and therefore accept low-rung jobs working as temporaries in the colleges.

Budget-minded administrators knew it would be impossible to disturb the sanctity of the "ivory tower," so they found a way to screw the new teachers—by simply not letting them in. In California, whenever a college-level teacher retires, he or she is increasingly replaced by a disposable, cheap, part-time teacher. More than half of the faculty at the college where I work is part-time and temporary. The ratio is even higher at other schools. The "teaching temp" is paid an hourly wage for classroom time only. There is no vacation pay, holiday pay, or health or retirement benefits. Months like December and April are total hell. While the old-timers bask in the luxury of periodic paid weeks off, part-timers get stuck with paychecks about half their normally miserable size. Nor is there compensation for classroom preparation time or "office hours," the customary time in which the teacher and student can talk one-on-one. At the end of the semester they "let you go"—unless, that is, they keep you on for the next semester... and keep you on for the next summer... and the next... and the next.

The result is that at the college level these days, half the faculty are walking zombies who are disillusioned, insecure... and tired. Part-timers spend their off-hours scrambling for other part-time jobs that can support their teaching habit. I work as a part-time word processor; an acquaintance of mine tutors high school kids. Many part-timers have families that rely on their income. It's not unusual for them to dash off after class, in a mad race to make a decent living. Most likely they jump in the car, get on the freeway, and drive 45 minutes or an hour to their next class at another school, or else they run home to grade piles of exams and papers, a grueling activity for which they don't get paid.

As a consequence, part-timers hardly ever see one another. I only know two other part-timers at my school, and I see them very infrequently. The implications

are obvious: we are too alienated, isolated and enervated to develop the camaraderie required for serious job organization. The AFT reps encourage us to attend their meetings, but we know they don't really represent us. We know we're going to have to organize ourselves if we want change, yet we're overcome with a paralyzing malaise, underneath which rage battles burn-out. But from day to day we mainly accept things, silently praying that enough of the old-timers will die so that we can get their jobs.

It's not just the part-timers who are suffering here: it's the whole system of education that's going down the tubes. Part-timers, generally speaking, do not participate in departmental affairs. Curriculum and policy are decided by the twenty-year veterans (the full-timers) who have generally given in to their apathy. A more cynical and beaten bunch you'd be hard-pressed to find. For the most part they're appalled at the degradation of education, yet they're overcome by inertia. They shrug apologetically when they see you in the halls, stopping to chat about "how the teaching's going," yet their primary goal is to reduce the amount of work they have to do themselves. Decision-making by the discouraged is a dreary business. Policy is either nondescript or totally inconsistent. Passing the buck has become elevated to an art.

In addition many full-timers strike me as having completely lost touch with student needs. Wracked by insecurity at being low-level professoriate, and despairing at the shrinking level of esteem society affords them, faculty members unconsciously vent frustration on their students. I've been appalled at the disparaging words exchanged among teachers in reference to the declining abilities of the students. That the students try their best, given inadequate intellectual preparation in high school and at home, isn't much considered. Nor does it strike the full-timers that perhaps building intellectual skills in the classroom first requires recognizing the validity of ignorance and understanding some of its origins.

It's funny, the community college teachers seem to think that the professors at the university level have it made because students there are "so much more intellectually motivated." But having just arrived at the community college from the university, I know better. Faculty alienation from students—and vice versa—is omni-

present in the university system. Students arrive at college less trained for critical analysis than for stifling obedience from which they understandably long to escape. Oversized classrooms and psychologically insensitive teaching methods have made instruction in the public schools a matter of power and submission. Professors at the college level interpret the younger student's indifference as "lack of academic ability and interest" rather than a healthy response to bullshit drudgery. Professional egos get bruised ("why should I have to teach incompetents?"), and students are punished for it.

The academy gets its steam from intellectual self-hatred. Professors rush to the library in their off-hours for research, to convince scrutinizing administrators and fellow academicians they are worthy of tenure. The competition is fierce, the work ethic unbounded. Professors then carry this weak-kneed egotism into the classroom, where they try to impress their poor students with what scholarly hot shit they are. Students are then blamed for not being smart enough to understand abstruse, self-obsessive, disorganized academic mumbo-jumbo. If they give up trying, as so many students have, then they're totally ignored by the education system. Many students have become "bottom-line" thinkers—the value of the intellectual effort is measured by its cost-effectiveness ("what'll this effort get me?").

The whole milieu for mind expansion and personal growth has become warped beyond belief. Used to be, a professor would hang out in office hours and students would drift in to discuss intellectual

issues, learning problems or personal dilemmas. A good teacher could really make a difference in somebody's life. Students often looked to a teacher for encouragement and advice and attention, stuff the student probably wasn't getting a lot of at home. But today, neither full-time nor part-time teachers have the psychic energy required to reach out and inspire. And students often seem more interested in their economic futures than in ideas or abstractions.

Nevertheless, many of my students strike me as starved for positive feedback, kind words, and strong role models. They're also hungry for something *interesting* that they can relate to. I myself am torn between my desire to provide them sympathetic guidance and adult friendship, which is so lacking for young people these days, and my unwillingness to donate too many hours of my already busy week. I usually volunteer three or four hours to office time, and I'm glad I do it, but it's not really enough. The sad truth is, with the majority of teachers on the run, the student who is slower or less confident will probably get overlooked. Students with learning disabilities or family problems often drop out.

Something pretty tragic's going on here: with a few minor exceptions, the personal relationship between student and teacher is becoming a thing of the past. Enrollments are declining as a result, creating more cutbacks, more substandard teaching, and less intellectually capable students. It's a bureaucratic vicious circle that's completely out of control, and virtually paralyzing education. And it's the kind of

organizational dysfunction you see everywhere these days.

The decline of education in America offends me to the core for a couple of different reasons. First of all, it represents the arrival of a new socio-economic line-up here in the richest country in the world. Today, even the *myth of America* as a "nation of middle-class people" is dying a rapid death. Social classes are polarized and the growing numbers of poor, without access to better opportunities, are mercilessly shut out of the system. Life in the eighties has become a survival-of-the-fittest aerobic scramble to the top, in order to join the closing ranks of the "boomoisie." The majority is undeniably being left behind.

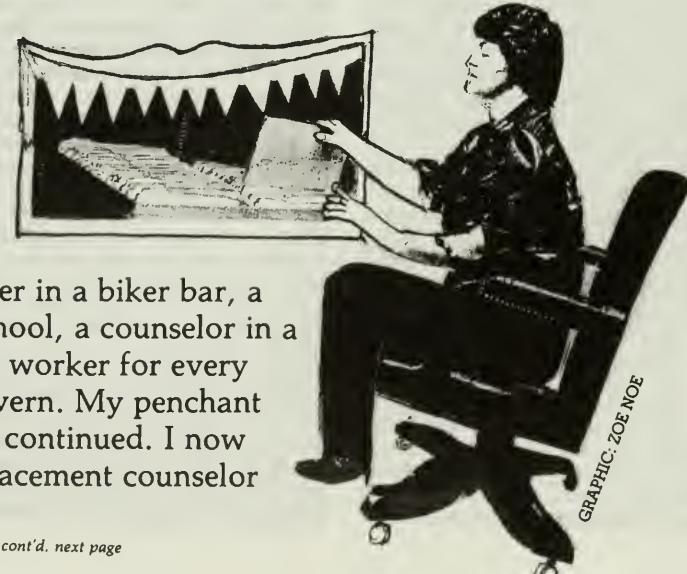
But the decline of education has other ramifications that I find equally frightening. Critical thinking and the thirst for knowledge are becoming rare. Mass media has chipped away at intelligent reasoning by offering fluff packages as "information." People are increasingly rendered passive by their ignorance. The old myths have made a comeback. Americans today are accepting responsibility for their own "failure," instead of lashing out at the appropriate instigators who value money over lives. We're at a dangerous crossroads. It'd be easy at this point to give in to fear or despair. I sense that tendency in me on the one hand—but I'm also too fucking angry to give up.



— Sophia Furia

## From Inside The Beast, Temporarily

My quest for "meaningful work" has led me down some weird paths. I've been a book-keeper for a cult, a bartender in a biker bar, a teacher in an alternative school, a counselor in a crisis center, and a political worker for every hopeless cause since McGovern. My penchant for bizarre occupations has continued. I now find myself working as a placement counselor for a temporary service.



cont'd. next page



According to recent statistics from the Dept. of Labor, employment services is one of the five fastest-growing businesses in the country. As a result of continuing mergers, economic cutbacks, and rising costs in employing full-time workers, many corporations are turning to temporary services to fill their employment needs. This, in turn, is creating a growing class of workers who receive low wages, few benefits, and absolutely no job security. In San Francisco, because of corporate mergers and companies moving their back-office operations out to the suburbs, even temporary work is becoming scarce for those with only clerical skills.

Clients pay a flat hourly rate to the temporary service. The average mark-up (the difference between what the temp is paid and what the client is billed) of 40% for large accounts and 60% for smaller accounts. Occasionally services are able to bill over 70%. Temps are never told what the client is being billed, and clients aren't told what the temp is being paid unless it's specified in a contract.

Temps receive few benefits. Some of the larger services offer vacation pay, sick pay, health insurance, and bonuses, but one way or another, they come out of the temp's paycheck, not the profit margin. Temps are covered for worker's compensation, state disability, and unemployment. Technically, the temp is eligible for unemployment benefits when a temporary job ends. But it is to the service's advantage to contest benefit awards, which then lowers its contributions to the unemployment fund. Temps can be denied unemployment benefits by turning down a subsequent assignment, failing to contact the service at specified intervals, or simply not answering phone calls.

Temps' job experience, qualifications, and motivation are perennial topics for management ridicule. Managers, however are collectively to blame for most of it. Job orders originate with the client's department supervisor, who is usually unfamiliar with the jobs he or she supervises. The supervisor conveys a sketchy job description to a coordinator in personnel, who then gives the information to the placement counselor at the temp service. By this time the description has been corrupted in the bureaucratic equivalent of the childhood game "Pass It On." Recently I was asked to release a temp whom the client felt couldn't read. The

temp, however, had a degree in literature. It turned out that she couldn't read Tagalog, which was the only language the client was able to write in.

Placement counselors have about twenty minutes to fill an order. Frantic phone calls go out. The job is given to the first person who answers the phone and can be talked into working. This frequently means threatening or guilt tripping the temp by saying things like "It may be a long time before we get another job that we would be able to send you on," or "I knew you really need the work so I held this job for you. If you decide not to take it, I won't be able to fill it and we will probably lose the client."

The counselor finally locates a temp and then the sales pitch begins. Counselors speak in a code that is matched only by "For Rent" ads in the Sunday paper. "Plush office" means a drafty warehouse "convenient financial district location" means somewhere near 3rd and Evans, "great pay rate" means 10¢ an hour over minimum wage, "wonderful boss" means a man who has all the wit and charm of a sex-starved cobra, "wear your jeans to work" means change into a suit before you get there and "a lot of learning potential" means learn how many envelopes you can stuff in an hour.

After a few days on the assignment, many temps decide they don't like the job and request a new assignment. The counselor sympathetically assures them that they will be remembered if anything comes up, "but things are slow right now." Rarely will a counselor re-assign the temp. Clients usually become irate if they have to train another temp, and the counselor sees it as just another hassle. A few days later the temp quits in exasperation and the whole cycle begins all over again.

Most of my clients treat temps as if they were interchangeable parts rather than people with real feelings. My most obnoxious client was a middle-aged jerk who kept requesting a "well-built, friendly, blonde girl." First, I told him that I couldn't take the order, as it was illegal. Then I explained that we weren't that type of service and gave him the number of a massage parlor. Next time he called, I accused him of being a sexist sack of shit. Finally, I sent him a "well-built, friendly, blonde" transvestite. I never heard from him again.

We all have our prejudices. I'll place just about anyone with the exception of the potentially violent, the terminally stupid, and *est* graduates. Occasionally people come in to register for jobs that temp services don't handle. I've had people

ask for work as a professional athlete, a bank president, an inventor, a guru, a dog-walker, and an astrologer. Several years ago, I had an ex-marine register as a Xerox operator. During the interview he showed me his training certificate for the 9400. He also showed me his certificates for hand-to-hand combat, bayonet practice, and grenade throwing. I had visions of him clearing a paper jam with a pugil stick, but we never heard from him again.

The worst part of my job is having to "release" someone; again the trade jargon suggests a mechanical part, such as a clutch or a brake. Usually temps are released because there is no more work. They are rarely told why, especially if the cause justifies legal reprisals. Just before the holidays, one of my temps was released after six months by the client. He had received great reviews from his supervisor and had even been training other temps. When I asked why he was being let go, the person speaking for the supervisor became extremely vague and said that she had been advised not to answer that question. It turned out that she was filling in for the temp's regular supervisor, who was on vacation; apparently she wanted him out of the office because he was openly gay. This was her only chance and she had documented enough petty infractions to conceal her real motive.

Job security also eludes placement counselors. I've been fired twice so far in this business. The first time, I had been working for a large service for over a year when our branch manager was fired. He was a warm, caring man who tried always to put people before profits and encouraged us to do the same. His replacement was a woman with a cheerleader personality and reptilian ethics. We loathed each other on sight. A few weeks after she started, she told me to release three of my temps who were on a long-term project so that those jobs could be given to her friends' kids. I told her to go fuck herself. She fired me for having a bad attitude, not being corporate-minded, and having an authority problem. Last year I heard that the company found a pretense to fire her, because a woman presumably couldn't handle the job. No one is exempt from lies and manipulation in this business.

The second time I was fired, I had been working as the manager of a new temporary service and was expected to sell the service in addition to placing temps. I had told the owner repeatedly during my interview that I was incapable of effectively selling anything to anyone. Then I was fired for not being able to sell. I'm on the verge of being fired again because of my attitude. So now I am trying to find a job with a zoo, cleaning elephant cages. At least then I'll know what I'm expected to shovel.

by Joni Hockert



# Sand and Steel

**T**he brick edifice anchored the block to Santa Cruz's business district by one corner. John Parks's "office" was a cubicle on the second floor and one of the most desirable in his section. It boasted two windows, and his desk was situated to take advantage of them. Most of the week they provided him with natural light by which he made his entries, one number to a square. The panes, with their clear centers and their corners radiused by dust, reminded him of zeroes on a worksheet.

But on Thursdays the train came.

He always heard it before he saw it: rhythmic clack-clacks, like his adding machine. Two dirty, black engines pulled the load—mostly low-sided cars piled high with coarse sand, and stout tank cars—with gruff rumbling into and then out of his sight around a gentle curve. The train redeemed Thursdays. He spent Thursdays humming 'The Wabash Cannonball' and filling the grids of his work sheets and journals with anonymous numbers.

It was the last Thursday in May that Parks saw them for the first time, two young men in jeans and tee shirts sprawled on the sunny side of the sand pile in one of the cars. He bolted from his chair, upsetting cold morning coffee, and leaned over the desk toward the glass. *Where are you going? Do you care?* he wanted to shout. *I wouldn't care. Not me. You don't know how lucky you are boys, to be out of work and on your way!* *I wouldn't care, just five hundred miles a day—that's all.*

The transparent reflection of his face stared back at him from the glass, gaining substance when superimposed on the dark passing cars, flickering to a watery ghost in the bursts of sunlight between them. In his mind's eye, he breathed crisp spring air, relaxing to the pulse of a thousand tons of rolling steel beneath him. The deserts bloomed this time of the year, pastel sands seemed to flow under gaudy waves of lavender and yellow blossoms. Magenta cactus flowers flashed by, like brakeman's lanterns; the air grew chill and the engines labored to attack a grade. Parks dug his elbows in, wiggled his butt

into the warm daydream sand and broke into the chorus of "Bound for Glory" when Mr. Menzel walked in and derailed his brain.

"JU-DAS PRIEST! PARKS! Mind your business, man." With thumb and forefinger he turned the sodden cover of the ledger. "Kramer International," he said, "Judas priest." He fingered his checkered tie.

"Anyone can han an—can have an accident—accident, Mr. Menzel," John blubbed, attempting to blot up the mess with sheets from a scratch pad.

"Bound," said Menzel, lifting the ledger free and holding it like a trough, draining the liquid that hadn't soaked into the swelling pages back into the cup, "for Glory." He glared out the windows and felt the last THUMP-thump, THUMP-thump of the departed iron horse. His fat little face warmed to a smile; his mustache twitched. "I understand, Parks. Distractions. Can't hear yourself think when that damn thing goes by. Don't you worry about it, Parks," he said, "we'll move you to Clinton's office. He's half-deaf, anyway. I'll call maintenance straight away and you'll be moved in tomorrow. You should have said something, Parks."

*Banished*, moaned John's inner voice. He pictured the majority of cubicles in the room: uniform boxes facing avocado, inner walls, the outlines of the cinder blocks shamefully undisguised, save for maybe a calendar with an image of the outside world on the top half and the days of the month dividing up the grid on the bottom.

The following morning he stumbled into his office in his usual one-cup stupor and found Clinton seated at his desk. "Hey, Bill, waiting for me?" he asked. "What's up?"

But Clinton stared out the window and didn't hear. *Oh yeah*, John remembered, and shuffled off to Clinton's old "office" in the north corner of the room.

Two walls flanked his desk, their tiers of blocks stacked to support the acoustic tile ceiling. The light, from the fluorescent fixtures overhead, pulsed at an almost imperceptible rate. He blinked at the two blocks directly across his desk at eye level, tried to see through them; Monday, he brought a poster of the Orient Express and taped it there. Tuesday, the tape peeled off, a train wreck on his blotter.

With four stick pins he got her back on track on the cubicle divider that protected him from Mavis Carson, on the left; but the train never disappeared. It seemed a

cruel thing to do, to trap a train like that. Wednesday, Menzel strode coolly into his cubicle and squinted at the ceiling.

"Is the light OK for you, Parks?" he asked, sliding a ledger onto the corner of the desk. "We're having a little trouble with your figures. Oh, no—no, not your procedure, that's fine. It's the figures themselves. Your 'ones'—look here," and he held down a column on the buff page with a stubby finger. "They look more like apostrophes. Now, that wouldn't be such a problem except *sometimes* they look like shepherd's crooks, which is what your 'sevens' are beginning to look like closed up 'nines'!" he shouted. "I can only be glad that there're no numbers which come close to resembling lower case q's except your 'FOURS.' I'm afraid you'll have to take this home and clear it up for us, Parks."

He grimaced, fingered his tie and stalked out, nearly trampling Mavis as she rushed to join the quitting time stampede. He snarled an apology. Mavis curled a horsey upper lip toward John in sneering accusation, clicking off in her tight skirt like she had a tennis ball between her thighs.

John woke up early Thursday morning and decided to walk. The fat white lines of a crosswalk wavered where countless cars had braked and accelerated on blistering summer days, distorting them like candle wax. He stepped off the curb and crossed outside the lines. Railroad tracks paralleled his route until, in deference to the weight they must carry, they made the bend around Frenchy's marsh. His street, a bearer of less substantial cargo, carried on across the bog on the narrow back of a blackberry-choked levee. The red lights on the long, black-and-white striped arms of the R.R. crossing guards flashed, and bells clanged as they descended, blocking the road across the marsh.

He felt the rumble of the approaching train through his hard leather shoes and picked out the car he'd take, well before it got to him. He started to run. His side ached and his breath burned and the CLACK-CLACK hurt his ears. His legs pumped CLACK-CLACK. His arms pumped CLACK-CLACK. His breath whooshed CLACK-CLACK. Whoosh CLACK-CLACK, whoosh CLACK-CLACK whoosh CLACK-CLACK."

His right arm shot out, his hand closed on the iron rung. But it was *too fast!* He squeaked; it lifted him off his feet, dragging him, his black leather shoes thumping the

ties, flashing steel wheels gleaming at his shins like pizza cutters. He panted shallow puffs of terror; his left shoe sailed down the roadbed into a blackberry thicket; he pulled his knees up but the motion sucked him toward the wheels and he had to let them down again. The right shoe bounded onto the track; the wheels sliced it in half. The heel hit a tie and flew into the air, tumbling and bounding down the embankment. He closed his eyes and screamed; it felt as though his feet were being beaten with sledge hammers. "Let go! LET GO!" his brain screamed. But he heard those wheels.

"Up ya come, buddy." Strong hands gripped his wrists, dragged him into the car. He lay on his back, gasping and sobbing with his eyes closed tight. His feet throbbed with the rhythm of the rails and he heard appsssshhh, like the brakes of engines in an Alfred Hitchcock movie. "Here, drink this." John felt himself being lifted into a sitting position; he opened his eyes. The morning Pacific flashed bright and clean and flickered in stop frames

through telephone poles. A chunky fellow in a polka-dot welder's cap and strap shirt sat beside him, passing him an open can of Old Milwaukee. The cold smoothness of the can soothed his aching hand.

The bubbles burned his throat. "I thought it was all over," he said when half the can was empty. His eyes adjusted to the light and he stopped squinting. He was seated on a sand pile and before and behind him he saw other sand piles, a chain of dunes. "Hey! I've seen you before! You and another guy were riding this train. That's luck, to pick a car with someone on it."

"Tom," said the fellow, and with a grin, held out his hand. "We were three cars back—took awhile to get here through all that sand. Here comes Henry now." He jerked his wobbling double chins toward the rear of the car. A short man was just plodding to the crest of the third dune behind them, his long, yellow hair whipping around his face; his arm went up in greeting as he plunge-stepped down the dune and out of sight. Shortly, he reap-

peared on the dune two cars behind. Before the beer bubbles stopped tickling, Henry was beside them, shrugging off the small back pack he carried and digging a hole in their mountain.

"Those are pretty fancy train duds," Henry observed, glancing at John as he buried more cans in the sand. "You taking the train to work?"

John poked his finger beneath the knot of his tie and wiggled it loose. He pulled the tail through and held it like a home-ward-bound pennant, and it snapped in the wind.

"Nope, I'm taking it *away* from work. I'm going to be a hobo—like you guys." The tie sailed into the air and landed in the car behind them, snaking over the sand in the wind. The bums grinned.

"Right on," said Tom.

"Yeah," said Henry. "Where do you work?"

He told them about the office and never-ending squares. Worksheets, cinderblocks, calendars, acoustic tiles, and Menzel's checkered tie. "And then they took my windows."

"Well, welcome aboard," Tom said.  
"It's not every day you meet a free man."  
He dug in the sand for another can.

"Can't say as I ever met one," Henry said. "Here's to a free man." Haze blanketed the horizon; trawlers floated on it. Outside the city the tracks hugged the coast, leaping over arroyos on arched trellises. Tom wailed the blues on a mouth harp, with two sour notes, and Henry tapped percussion with two empty cans. "ALL-right, ALL-right," he said, when John got carried away and blasted into "The Train That Carried My Girl From Town," and they CLACK-CLACKED into the afternoon.

"Whoa! John, it's been great having you aboard. We sure needed vocals, didn't we, Henry?"

"That's a fact," said Henry. The air filled with a vicious screeching and rattling, the train slowed to a crawl. Pillars of steam spiraled from three gigantic stacks a mile ahead. John blinked at the sheds, conveyors and silos, everything the color of the sand. The clacks settled down to high-heel clicks as the train inched towards the buildings. A red Cadillac pulled abreast of their car. Its horn tooted.

"Right on time," observed Henry.

'Who's that?'

"That's Mary, my wife. She gives us a lift every fourth Thursday," Tom said.

*"What's that place?"*

"Davenport Cement Works. They make that pre-mixed concrete and cinder blocks. Thousands and thousands of 'em. That's what they use all the sand for. Pick it up south of Salinas and run it in every Thursday. Heck, this line's only sixty miles long. But it's a swell ride, huh John?"

"It sure is," said Henry.



by G. Y. Jennings



# All in a Day's Work

**T**he air was hot, smelled of plastic.

"There's nothing wrong with plastic," the old man said, convinced. "It's all a damn communist plot, this cancer thing." He worked with a hot glue gun, cementing plastic wedges in the corners of black and brown plastic shutters. He was past 60 and had worked with the plastic company for over 10 years. Furniture, that's what the young guys said about him. Furniture taking up space.

Pam, that's what they called it.

Polyurethane Pam.

It was a huge machine which ate colored plastic pellets and shit out semi-transparent sheets. The sheets were fitted in metal runners and sold as shower stall doors. My job was to guide the sheets out of Pam the Plastic Extruder, snap off hot excess strips which burned the tips of the fingers, throw the strips in a recycle bin, and place the sheets on a dolly.

Over and over, eight hours a day.

The stench of plastic impregnated everything—my hair, my skin, my clothes, the peanut butter and jelly sandwich I ate daily at noon.

Cancer, I thought.

Lab animals with ugly grey tumors protuberating from beneath fur. At night, after washing the odious smell of plastic off my body with hot water and soap, I thought about cancer. Who knows? The scientists know, but they aren't saying. Some of them are saying, but nobody is listening. Cancer's signature is intangible—it appears, after 20 years of inhaling noxious plastic vapors, toxic fumes, smoke, and it gives very little indication of where it came from.

The victim sleeps, uncertain.

## II

Red marker on cardboard:  
PLEASE GIVE ME A JOB.

The old woman and I wait for the Warren thru bus. It's 30 minutes late, as usual.

"He ain't gonna get a job," the old woman says.

"Why? He's willing," I say.

The man grips his placard and walks up and down the sidewalk. He wants a job. It's not a huge request. A little dignity, self-respect. But nobody's hiring. Nobody wants a man who probably worked for 20 years on an automotive line or in some dingy tool-&-die.

"The Depression was bad," the old woman says. "But I ain't never seen nothing like this. Old and young folks are getting thrown out on the street with nowhere to go. Crazy folks, too. There's always a line at the soup kitchen. I don't care what that president says. He should come to Detroit and see what is going on."

MY NAME IS FRANK MILEWSKI.  
PLEASE GIVE ME A JOB.

Maybe Frank Milewski assembled brakes at River Rouge. Maybe he wasn't sick or late one day in 20 years. It doesn't matter. There's no place for him. He doesn't figure in the new scheme. Maybe, if he's lucky, he'll get a job working as a janitor at Sears or K-Mart making \$4.50 an hour.

It's difficult to live decently when you make \$4.50 an hour. This is America, not Honduras. Frank Milewski lives in a country where the standard of affluence is determined by the number of things an individual owns. One cannot buy many things earning \$4.50 an hour. One cannot get sick and buy medical care earning \$4.50 an hour, no benefits.

Frank Milewski was probably building a nest egg with his factory earnings when they pink-slipped him. They assigned him to the industrial scrap heap. People like Frank Milewski believe in the American Dream. Now many of them pound the cold pavement, begging for a job: dishwasher, waitress, tire mechanic, maid, janitor at Burger King.

"Peoples' hearts are turning to ice," the old woman says.

"Nobody cares?"

"Some do but there's less and less. Nobody trusts Jesus anymore. There's no faith in God. I worry about the children, the poor little children. What's the future hold for them? I know one thing—I don't wanna be around in 10 years to find out."

You are strong today, weak tomorrow.

Will I one day become a victim, a statistic in the enlarging ledger of Social Darwinism? What do you think? Do you think our futures will be any less brutal, any more humane?

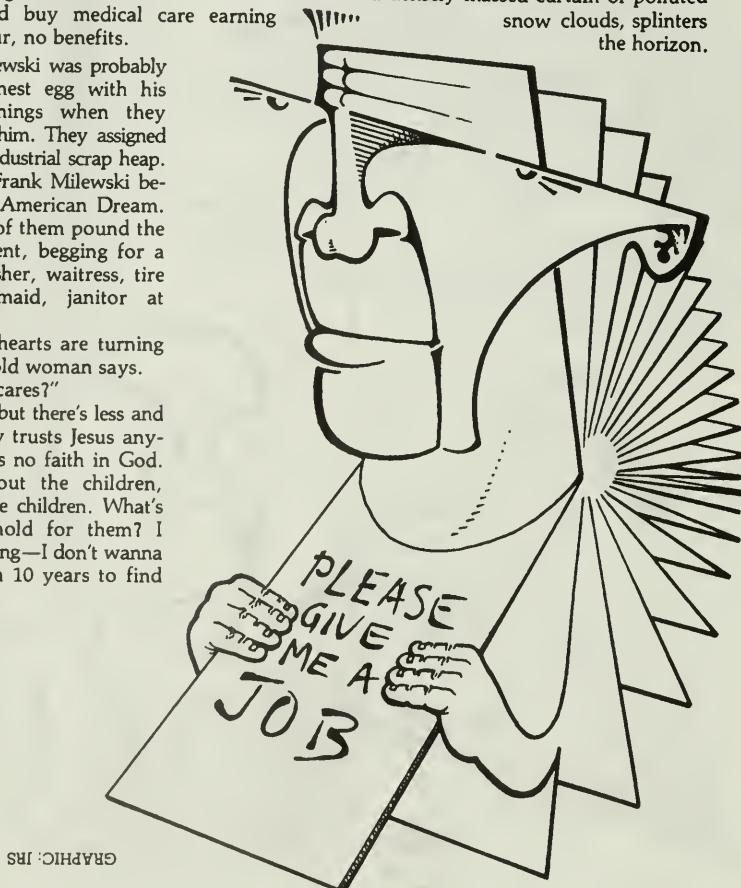
The bus moves in on us.

People, ferrying between mundane jobs or school, convene under the bus boarding sign. The first biting winds of winter howl piteously through the wide conduit of street. People struggle with dignity and respect in 30 different ways.

PLEASE GIVE ME A JOB. A CHANCE. HOPE.

Frank Milewski walks up the street, past the warm windows of the old market and the new bank. People improvise, learn to dance as the economic heat is turned up. Frank Milewski walks with his desperate placard as the traffic on Warren Avenue moves back and forth with unremitting persistence.

New Darwinism, exploding from behind a densely massed curtain of polluted snow clouds, splinters the horizon.



### III

Early afternoon, I stop in for coffee.

Two white plain clothes cops sit at a table. They have walkie talkies bulging from under nylon windbreakers. I know they also have concealed guns. They sit poker-faced, sipping coffee and smoking cigarettes. They are taking a short break from the reality of the streets.

"Milfred, my man," a husky black man says. The cops acknowledge him with disinterested nods.

"You peddling stuff, Jackson?" one of the cops inquires.

"Me? Aw, man!" Jackson says, striking a theatrical pose intended to argue his innocence. "I stop that shit long time ago. You won't catch me out there selling any shit. That's kid play. Man, the school kids are selling that crap now."

The cops don't like Jackson.

They can't do much about the kids.

I'm reading a newspaper at the counter. Korean diplomats killed by a bomb. There is speculation: the communists did it. The Korean military is on red alert. A young waitress slants lazily against the counter. She reads the horoscopes. I can hear the cops laugh at something Jackson has to say. Dope pumps through underground sewers of despair. High school kids dream of fancy cars, jewelry, nice clothes, nickel-plated pistols. There isn't much any of us can do about it.

"Who blew away that dude at the projects?" Jackson asks.

"Can't tell you. I don't know," a cop admits.

"Competition?"

"Scum Warriors."

"Who wants competition?"

A joke. Jackson smiles. The cops smirk.

Who runs the dope? How much dope? Who sells it?

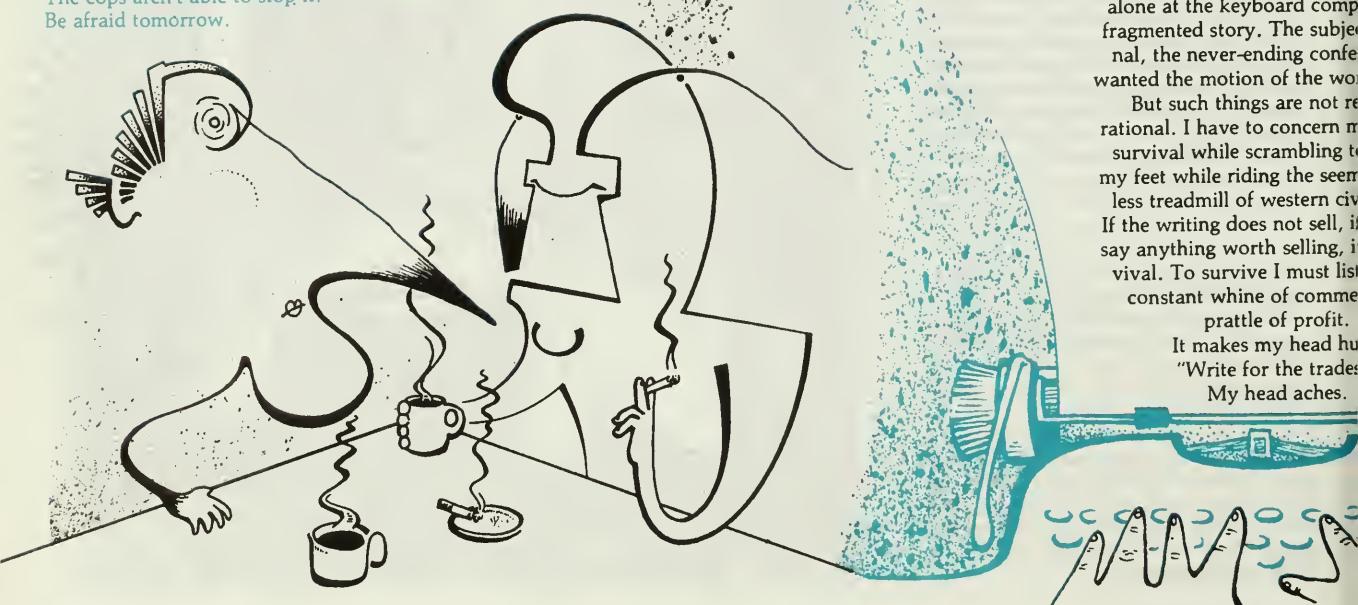
Enough sold to keep the ghettos from bursting into flames again? I think the cops are part of it. Complicity is exceptionally profitable, part and parcel of a hard-edged street capitalism. Jackson is part of it. John Q. Public, however, doesn't want to see kids involved in running vials of crack. Keep the kids out. It's too much when kids have running gun battles in the street.

I drink my coffee.

Kids selling dope. What will they sell tomorrow? How many 14-year-olds will be shot?

The cops aren't able to stop it.

Be afraid tomorrow.



"I think that there is nothing, not even life itself, that is more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, than this incessant business of living."

—Henry David Thoreau

### IV

If he's off the floor this much," the foreman says, "he can't use his grunting underling," we can't use him.

It was a steel fabrication shop in Stone Mountain. I was in the stall reading a newspaper. The John Smiths were in the stall reading a newspaper. The John Smiths were in the stall reading a newspaper. The John Smiths were in the stall reading a newspaper. They didn't bother to hire an

My job was die assistant to a grizzly old man who had been working there for two o'clock in the afternoon and I'd cut my hand for him. It wasn't a first aid station, but the foreman kept band-aids in sight of blood, frowned upon an injured employee. So I went around my bleeding wound and retreated to the sanctum of the die, reading a newspaper when the foreman came in with my bowel problem didn't cure itself by the next day, he told me on the street looking for another job.

Since I had a note due on the car, my bowel problem was still there after the afternoon.

I remember staring at the old man's digitless hand as we sat in the die. No fingers on one hand, few teeth left in the mouth. I was reading a newspaper when the foreman came in with my bowel problem didn't cure itself by the next day, he told me on the street looking for another job.

After six weeks, I walked out.

### VI

"What are you gonna do?" he asked. I glanced at him and chewed on the question. "What am I gonna do?"

"With the writing."

"Write it. Does it matter? I'm not submitting now," I said. I mouthed the words. I knew my friend disliked the helplessly lost in the snobbish academics.

"Write for money," my friend suggested.

"Money? Purity? I can't write anything except money. It was true. I tried a short story, but it was commercial and failed miserably. Poetry was out of the question.

write poetry.

"Write for the trade magazines," my friend suggested.

"Yeah," I said. "Sure. The

Suddenly I had the urge to write alone at the keyboard computer. I wanted to tell a fragmented story. The subject was the continual, the never-ending conflict, the motion of the world.

But such things are not rational. I have to concern myself with survival while scrambling to my feet while riding the seemingly endless treadmill of western civilization. If the writing does not sell, it says nothing worth selling, it is not survival. To survive I must listen to the constant whine of commerce, the prattle of profit.

It makes my head hurt.

"Write for the trades," my friend said.

My head aches.

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ess."

Thoreau

V

Scab, they called her. After 90 days, you join automatically—no choice, you are signed on and dues are taken from your paycheck before you see it.

She was recently hired, hadn't put in 90 days. She worked as an office helper, which is the same thing as a secretary. The union went out on strike. Everybody was out except the managers and supervisors. When she came to work, a union woman called her a scab.

They might fire me, she explained. I'm not in the union yet.

Scab, the union woman said. The union woman was dressed for a career. She looked identical to her management counterpart. Except, of course, for her union badge. Cross the line, she threatened, and you're a scab. Simple as that, no substitutions.

She couldn't afford to lose her job. Divorced, with a young daughter. A sullen and occasionally violent ex who did everything he could to make her life difficult.

She needed the job, regardless of how little it paid. Her ex was months behind in the child support. She lived in the high rent district where she put her daughter in a good school. Scab or not, she crossed the line.

The union put her on the list: *scab*. After the strike was settled, the union woman made it tough for her. Not in so many words she told her that the union wouldn't back her up if there were to be trouble in the office. The union, like management, needed logs for the fire, enemies to fortify a fragile equilibrium.

Last year they went out on strike again.

She was one of a handful who wanted to push management against the wire on the contract. But sell-outs—professional union sell-outs with large incomes—steered the membership into a watered-down contract which left them essentially where they had started. She out for six weeks and came up with nothing. She had to borrow money in order to stay on her feet and pay the bills. Her ex wasn't about to help out. The union had sold the membership down the river. The union was run by people who thought like managers and the presidents of large multinational corporations.

A few days after the strike, she saw the union woman at McDonalds. She was sitting in McDonalds with a coffee when the union woman came in. The union woman could have passed as a manager or president's adjutant. Her new union car was double-parked at the curb. The union woman bought hamburgers at McDonalds—a non-unionized, minimum-wage employer which had vehemently resisted all organizing efforts. She apparently saw nothing wrong with it. Or, more likely, was blind.

But she knew a scab when she saw one.

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GRAPHICS: J R SWANSON

## VII

It's an insurance company.

I do and I don't know what I'm getting myself into. "Our clerks advance rapidly," the beaming stooge tells me the day I hire on. I don't care about advancement. I know I'll never get there. All I want is to be left alone, to work an easy job, make enough money to put a roof over my head and write in the evenings—an impossible dream, I realize.

Do it like a whore, for the money.

They provide a desk. They allow space for family photographs on the vacuous white formica wall of an office partition. The Supe, a born-again Christian with a 700 Club pin affixed to his lapel, introduces me to the job. Filing, sorting, proofreading. More filing, sorting. Endlessly, until you're ready for a pension, a retirement of unkind poverty.

I complete one stack, go after another.

Years of absurd work, going nowhere.

Never advance.

Always mediocre.

## VIII

I stare at the sign, glowering.

ARE YOU TIRED OF NOT MAKING ENOUGH MONEY?

It's fixed to a runner slotted above my head on the green metal wall of the Grand River thru.

Always something to sell, I think.

A dejected ad photograph man with his face buried in his hands. This man, it is hoped I'll believe, is extremely tired of not making enough money. He's tired of being passed over, of not being included in the Megabuck Dream. Do the people riding Grand River thru identify with the unhappy man in the photograph? Will they buy that which the ad agency was hired to sell—in this instance, a degree from an electronics technical school—and move the money around?

The man in the photograph is a loser.

Because he is not on the Fortune 500 list. What a pile of shit, I think.

Economic roles. It's easy, see? Over there, that's Machine Shop. Art Class there. And over there is Economics Class. Which will it be? Banker? Laborer? Pregnant housewife? Soldier? Secretary? It's easy. It's also very hard, depending on your decision. It depends on the role you take or the one you end up with. Depends on whose reality you're buying.

I'm not buying anything.

I'm not the buy on TV, or the one in the photograph.

Not an actor. Not the president of the United States. I'm not a computer clerk just now getting his start, learning disappointment. I'm trying to run, but my feet are inexplicably stuck in the ooze of economic quicksand.

"Southfield Cross," the driver drones.

TIRED OF NOT MAKING ENOUGH MONEY?

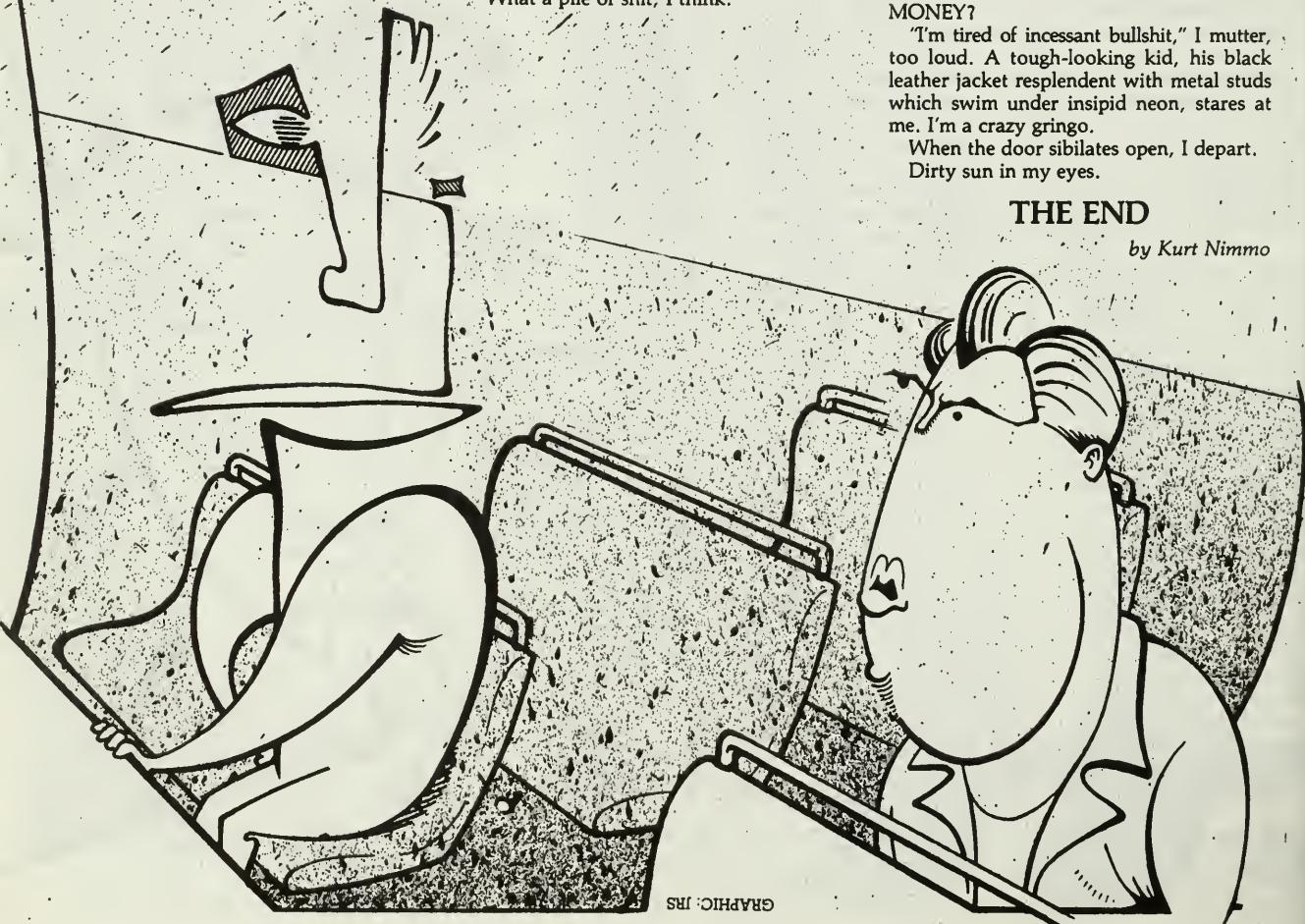
I'm tired of incessant bullshit," I mutter, too loud. A tough-looking kid, his black leather jacket resplendent with metal studs which swim under insipid neon, stares at me. I'm a crazy gringo.

When the door sibilates open, I depart.

Dirty sun in my eyes.

THE END

by Kurt Nimmo



GRAPHIC: JRS

# Kaiser Don't Care! SEIU Neither!

## Rank & File Activists Talk About the Kaiser Strike

*"The strike slogan was 'Kaiser Don't Care' and they don't care about the patients. We care about the patients and that's how they get the work out of us and that builds resentment in us... They [Kaiser] know we'll get in there and work our butt off."*

—Blanche Bebb, X-ray technician, Committee for a Democratic Union (CDU), negotiating committee member, SEIU Local 250.

*"Kaiser is the perfect example of waste because every time a problem comes up, their solution is to hire a new supervisor—I've worked at Merrill Lynch and American Express. They are huge, totally worthless corporations and Kaiser is more top-heavy with supervisors than they were."—Denny Smith, Nurse's Aide, Committee for a Democratic Union (CDU), SEIU Local 250 member.*

From October 27 to December 13, 1986, 9,000 Kaiser Hospital workers throughout northern California were on strike. The strike's key issue was Kaiser's goal of imposing a two-tier wage system (i.e. where new hires are paid less than current workers), a goal they ultimately achieved in spite of workers voting it down: at first by a 4-1 margin and then by 55-45% after nearly six weeks on strike. The rank and file members of Local 250 bitterly resisted two-tier, rejecting Kaiser's contention that the company needed it to remain competitive. "If they wanted to do something about their so-called competition, they wouldn't have patients waiting three months to see a doctor," said Bebb.

In late October, after two months of negotiations, SEIU Local 250 struck against a contract proposal that would have imposed a 30% lower wage on new hires in about half of Kaiser hospitals and clinics (those in the suburbs north of the Bay Area and in the Central Valley around Sacramento and Stockton). Striking workers included licensed vocational nurses,

respiratory therapists, pharmacists, x-ray techs, clericals, and housekeepers. Another 700 optical workers and medical technologists from two smaller unions were also on strike.

On December 4 these two smaller unions accepted a 20% wage cut for new hires. However, most of these workers stayed off the job until the settlement with the larger Local 250 ten days later, which provided 15% less for new hires. Up to 200 workers from five other unions, as well as several hundred registered nurses, also honored picket lines. Sympathy walkouts by as many as 65% of Kaiser RNs during the first weeks led Kaiser to get a legal injunction to prevent the California Nurses Association from engaging in such actions. In response, CAN members formed an ad hoc group separate from the union, RNs for Quality Care, to organize their support for the strike.

In spite of this support for the strike from other workers, some Kaiser workers blamed the union for not organizing more support.

**"When it comes to fundamental things like union democracy or strong political action that would change the way health care is delivered in this country, the unions are reactionary."**

—Denny Smith

In a post-strike *S.F. Chronicle* piece on Dec. 19, a Committee for a Democratic Union activist, John Mehring (a psychiatric technician at another hospital) said: "If the SEIU was involved early on in the negotiations, why was the organization of the strike so haphazard and inconsistent? Why weren't strike benefits extended? If the handwriting was on the wall that two-tier was becoming more prevalent in Local 250 contracts, why wasn't more effort done early so a united front could have been made?"

Many Local 250 members believe the International sabotaged the strike. After collecting some \$25 million in union dues over the last six years the International paid back \$2.2 million in strike benefits. At the end of six weeks on strike, and two contract rejections by rank and file vote, SEIU announced (about two weeks before Xmas) that strike benefits would be cut from \$60 to \$45 for that week, and cease altogether the following week. With no prior warning about diminishing strike funds, workers had no chance to develop outside strike funding from the community and other workers and unions. [Just as we go to press, SEIU has blamed the exhaustion of strike benefits on a "breakdown" in management of members' dues by Local 250 officials—*SF Chron.* 3-23-87.]

In a wide-ranging interview with Blanche Bebb and Denny Smith, activists in the rank-and-file Committee for a Democratic Union (CDU), it became clear that the militance of Kaiser workers was very much in spite of the SEIU International. "99% of picket line activities were organized by the rank and file" said Bebb. "The union was only interested in the corporate campaign (i.e. pressuring directors and other companies to withdraw from their normal transactions with the struck firm) which is the New Strategy for Unions'."

The International came in to run the local some weeks before the strike actually began and since the strike's unsuccessful conclusion it has put the Local, which is some \$800,000 in debt, into trusteeship. Since late 1986, it has suspended all meetings of the Local executive board and trustees.

Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program, by far the largest independent Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) (controlling over 58% of the market compared to its nearest competitor at 9%), is growing nationally and the Kaiser contract is a pace-setter for many of SEIU's other medical contracts. After a lousy settlement three years ago in which part-timers lost extra pay and comp time for holiday work, disgruntled members elected seven rank and file activists on the CDU slate to the executive board of Local 250. The International came in at this time because its officials feared that a bad contract would allow CDU to take over the Local in the elections scheduled for this spring. Now

Do they care?  
Or don't  
they?!



that the International has presided over a bad settlement, it is using its ability to suspend democracy in the union.

The International officials poorly organized the strike. According to Bebb and Smith, officials ineffectually trained new shop stewards and a 49-member bargaining committee. "The training was more like est training—they didn't really talk about negotiations and what we were up against," said Bebb. The people designated by the union to head the negotiations had never negotiated with Kaiser before: an attorney and a representative from the Washington D.C. office of the International.

In spite of its mistrust of union officials, CDU agitated among the workers to support the union and the strike. CDU urged a fight against the two-tier wage structure, while the International tried to make "quality patient care" the main issue. Smarting from past media portrayals of striking hospital workers as callous, uncaring and selfish, the International pushed the idea for a joint labor-management patient care committee to improve quality. The original proposal was for a tripartite Local 250/management/community committee: the negotiators ended up with an annual one-day seminar in which Kaiser managers and workers discuss patient care, with no community involvement. The International claimed this as a victory, a foot in the door, but Bebb says she'd rather not have it. She argues that this was an intentional distraction from the importance of resisting the two-tier: "Two-tier is about patient care, because morale will plummet when the two-tier is implemented."

"I feel really proud that we twice rejected the two-tier [during this period]," Smith says. Bebb: "The International had

to really get behind it and sell it. They shoved it down our throats. We forced them out of the closet, though." The International accepted a 2-tier proposal from Kaiser and pushed it through the bargaining committee with 'no recommendation,' hoping that the members would accept it, so they could blame the members for not being strong enough. When workers rejected the contract on Dec. 4 by a 55-45% margin, the International was forced to really sell the next proposal, with "heavy-duty speakers" at every meeting. It won ratification on Dec. 13 in spite of being voted down by a slim majority in San Francisco and by a 2-1 margin in the East Bay.

At this point our interview digressed beyond the strike. Local 250 members have already been taking direct action to address patient care at SF Kaiser. Two workers circulated a petition to create an AIDS-only ward after ongoing difficulties in providing adequate care for AIDS patients. Combined with pressure from the SF City Human Rights Commission (which in turn was being pressured by dissatisfied, Kaiser-insured gay city employees), the workers' initiative succeeded.

Denny Smith: "The union, typically, wanted to do it top-down. Our business agent, Sal Roselli, wanted to handle everything himself. He wanted to call the hospital administrator and work things out... Our AIDS-Action committee had to constantly keep him in check so that decisions were made by the rank and file, because it was our idea in the first place. His whole approach, like the union's approach to everything, is to pick up the phone and call some topdog in the hospital, which is probably the way contracts get signed. The AIDS Ward is working now, and because it has pressure from the workers and community, it works pretty well."

Smith is a charter member of CDU, which was formed in 1981 after several years of informal rank and file caucuses in the late 70s. CDU's core consists of 10-20 activists, with many more supporters throughout the local. Smith characterized the breakdown of attitudes among CDU's rank and file allies as follows: those who are angry because they didn't get a raise from the strike; those who are angry because they see the union is undemocratic and is going downhill; those who would join CDU but are intimidated by red-baiting; and those who would be activists but for kids at home and/or two-job schedules. I asked Smith and Bebb to describe their fondest fantasies if they were to get rid of the current leadership and change the union. The discussion kept on widening in scope from that point on.

Blanche Bebb: I think the strike has proven that our members are so full of energy and imagination and ideas that they never have any chance to express... We want to see the rank and file get liberated and really

see the union as theirs and use it. To some extent that happened during the strike—people were going down there and taking the initiative... The main thing is that we wouldn't be afraid of the rank and file. That's a big difference. We believe in and trust the members, and we're not into having a job in a bureaucracy. We could have creative picket lines and cultural activities at meetings, not just read the minutes from the last meeting.

**Denny Smith:** These guys make [meetings] as dead as possible. They couldn't be more lethal.

**Processed World:** In talking about all this stuff it's very easy to get bogged down in all the immediate details—the contract, working conditions. But the longer view is

that U.S. health care delivery is being dramatically restructured. Part of that is the concentration of capital in mega-hospital corporations, and another is a major push by insurance companies, government and these hospital corporations to maintain the private control of health care profits. There are plenty of ideas floating around about how to restructure health care toward not-for-profit, human need. Are there any embryonic committees within CDU which are trying to address this bigger picture? Maybe from the point of view of developing an alternative agenda and based on alternative values?

**D.S.:** Health care in the U.S. is such a fucked-up system. Any fair-minded person would have to support some kind of na-

tional cradle-to-grave health care system that doesn't depend on profits or the greed of some chairmen of the board. We've had some brainstorming sessions about what our caucus might do if we won some powerful position in the union: home care for the homeless; a hiring hall for unemployed health workers; political action to push for a national health plan; political action to push for better care for geriatric and nursing home patients...

**B.B.:** Unions are tied into the Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) idea. A lot of unions control the trust funds that pay the money and they have a vested interest in the current set-up. It won't be easy to get unions out of HMOs, just like it won't

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MATT  
GROENING

HELL  
AHoy

# ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME YOU QUIT YOUR LOUSY JOB?

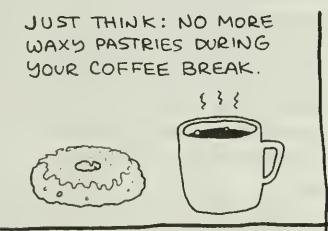


WAKE UP, CHUMPLY, YOU'RE NOT GETTING ANY YOUNGER. THE CLOCK IS TICKING. YOU CAN'T JUST SIT THERE IN YOUR CUBBYHOLE WHILE LIFE PASSES YOU BY. YOU'RE WASTING YOUR VALUABLE TIME. YOU'VE GOT SYMPHONIES TO COMPOSE. NOVELS TO WRITE. SNOWMOBILES TO PURCHASE. LET'S GET OUR BUTTS IN GEAR RIGHT NOW.

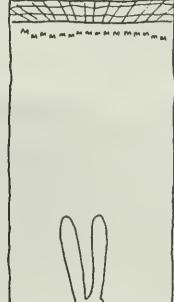


YOU WON'T MISS YOUR OLD BOSS, MOST LIKELY.

YOU CAN DO IT. YOU CAN DO IT. YOU CAN DO IT. YOU CAN DO IT. YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO IT. MAYBE.



ASK NOT FOR WHOM THE OVERHEAD FLUORESCENT LIGHTING HUMS.



be easy to get unions to take a progressive stand on anything! This is the AFL-CIO: top, top, top. SEIU International is part of that. That's what these Internationals and the AFL-CIO are about: keeping us in line as workers.

But on the other hand, workers need unions—we have to be in unions. I'm scared about three years down the line, depending on where the members are at, if they let it be known that they're not ready to strike, we may lose our seniority, in which case, well hell, we won't have a job.

D.S.: ...When it comes to fundamental things like union democracy or strong political action that would change the way health care is delivered in this country, the unions are reactionary. They just take easy positions on things that won't cost them any union dues.

PW: Internationals and most locals associated with the AFL-CIO are so wrapped up in capitalism and such staunch defenders of The Way It Is Now because the officials are making \$50-\$60,000 a year. Why would they want to fight against that? They get to drive around in big cars, hang out with important people, get talked about in the newspapers. Which raises a difficult question for rank and file activists like yourselves: what's to prevent the next person in charge from being corrupted by that status and privilege and power? If you get elected into that same system, it seems to be quite difficult to abolish that power you finally won after all those years of trying to get it.

B.B.: I don't think you can do it just within one local... I just have to be optimistic. God knows when it'll happen, but there is a movement... Local 1199 in N.Y.C. is a good example. Since a rank and file committee took over they've done a lot—they do theater, they've put people through medical school, even housekeepers. But this is the exception, and anyway, anytime you get anywhere, the International comes in.

PW: And trusteeship is not far behind... What are unions doing essentially but bartering the terms of slavery?—that's the old ultra-left line, which we could argue about to the end of time.

BB: But it is the organization of the working class... You can't just run out and create something else...

PW: Most unions, as you have pointed out in this interview, have very little to do with what the workers they represent are actually doing on a day-to-day basis, and often times, they put themselves in active opposition to what the workers want. The union becomes a different entity with different interests. When workers are trying to find new methods they invariably find their International and/or Local right in the way. It's one of the first obstacles they have to overcome. So to talk about the Local as the organization of those workers isn't really accurate. If those workers are organized, that's their organization, whether it be informal or something like CDU. Whereas the Local is a remnant of an earlier effort that became separate from what gave it its original impetus, and now comes back as an obstacle.

D.S.: As CDU we're definitely pro-union. This has come up because the union has spread rumors that we're anti-union and want to decertify and we have to tell people: 'No, we just want to take back our union, because the union is ours.'

B.B.: During the strike we were left on our own on the picket lines, and then people kept saying: 'We are the union'—I heard a lot of that. It's the classic one they're always telling us: 'What are you complaining about the union for? You are the union,' of course knowing that we're not. But during the strike, we were, we kept the committees going, we raised the money, we did all the work, we picketed. How do we take that and keep it going?

PW: So that's the living union as opposed to the dead union—the legal entity that has all the money.

B.B.: On the shop floor level, the shop stewards can do a helluva lot. You can organize about anything you want, call meetings about anything, demand to see anyone. They can say 'No,' and then you can organize an action with 20 people—but in order to be protected and not get your activists fired, you need the protection of the union. You know you'd be out the door if you did these things and you weren't a shop steward, or if it weren't a union shop.

PW: That's a good example of how you get some legal protection from the union, but there are also numerous examples of people getting the axe with the complicity of their union, and they're gone, that's the end of it.

B.B./D.S.: Yeah, it's true.

PW: Unless you have that extremely strong rank-and-file movement that will get out there right away and strike or act on behalf of the person who got axed with the union's complicity or whatever the issue may be, then the union is ephemeral, it doesn't really exist. The union is action, living action by the workers, and without that what have you got?

D.S.: Sometimes I feel like if [the unions] are rotten to the core then the whole thing needs to be scrapped and [we need to] start over with some new form of workers' organization. But in the strike, the scabs would always say: 'Look what your union did last time, why would you be out on the sidewalk if that's what they're going to do to you?' And then the people who were really willing to fight would counter that with: 'This is my union and I'm gonna be out there because I'm the one who's gonna be screwed.' It was the vocabulary of the day that we had to deal with. I think other forms may arise, perhaps not in the near future...

B.B.: That's why I say you have to be flexible, ready for any opportunity, to make alliances with everybody you can, and just be there at the time. It's like this strike, we could have said 'SEIU is gonna sell you out anyway, so why bother?' but we said, 'Oh no, jump in there, get involved.' And I think we gained a lot, lost money but gained more.

PW: We have these arguments within the PW collective all the time. Even if you are critical of the existing bureaucratic unions, nevertheless (and your case is a good example) the union provides a context in which people can organize and talk to each other. Even if they find themselves having to talk about being in opposition to that union, they've already linked up that way. It creates certain channels of communication that are very hard to establish from scratch. Then the problem becomes vocabulary, and finding a language that breaks through the conceptual baggage. For example, putting out the word 'union' as an "association of individuals getting together for their mutual interests in opposition to the labor laws which have been written specifically to prevent them from getting anywhere," might change the whole complexion of that word.

\* \* \* \* \*

The interview then disintegrated into a general conversation on working class politics around the world. A month after this interview was conducted, Local 250 was put into trusteeship in spite of strenuous efforts by Bebb, Smith and CDU to avert it. CDU will have to wait up to eighteen months before there is a union election. A lot of grassroots organizing will have to be maintained and consolidated in order for them to bring a new direction to SEIU Local 250 in the future.

—Interview conducted by Lucius Cabins





# Hot Under the Collar

## Chips 'n' Dips

The microchip industry's credibility regarding workers' health has dipped so low that the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) recently invoked its own tattered image to dodge fresh evidence of dirt in its "clean" rooms.

The evidence, which attracted national attention, issued from a University of Massachusetts study of Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) workers. The focus was on workers who process microchips at DEC's Hudson, Massachusetts, plant. Summaries of the study were released to DEC and the *Boston Globe* in December 1986. The study, according to *Globe* reporter Bruce Butterfield, found "double and higher the incidences of worker-reported rashes, headaches, and arthritis" and, among male workers, "significantly higher incidences of nausea." The most publicized finding, however, was of a twice-normal miscarriage rate—39%—among workers in wafer-etching areas. An alarming 29% miscarriage rate was found among wafer photolithography workers.

Liable for damages from injured worker lawsuits, the industry responded by denying, as it has for years, a causal connection between clean room chemicals and fetal damage. Inspired by self-interest, the industry dismisses claims that arsine, phosphine, chlorine, and hydrofluoric and hydrochloric acids—all found in abundance in most wafer fabs—contribute to the notoriously high "systemic poisoning" rates among semiconductor workers (for more on clean room hazards, see "Chemicals Run Amok—Where's the Dirt?" in PW 17). DEC promptly banned on-site interviews with workers at the Hudson plant.

Amid all the dissembling over the study's results, some firms adopted "precautionary" policies that appeared to deal with the problem. DEC announced a policy of free pregnancy testing and job transfers for all women of child bearing age who worked in the high-risk areas. AT&T went furthest, mandating job transfers out of controversial clean room work for pregnant women. Despite evidence that clean room chemicals (such as glycol ethers) cause shrunken testicles, not to mention a variety of disorders in male and female laboratory animals, none of the chipmakers would guarantee transfers for exposed male workers, who, the industry explained, weren't having the miscarriages.

Sheila Sandow is a spokesperson for the SIA. According to the *Silicon Valley Toxic News* (Winter 1987) and *San Jose Mercury News*, Ms. Sandow responded to the DEC-sponsored study by noting that women working

in certain chipmaking areas have a "personal responsibility" for their health and pregnancy. Accordingly, Sandow advised women to consult their doctors (not their lawyers) if they become pregnant. She also allowed that DEC and AT&T's policies of job transfers for affected women "could create problems, especially when the industry as a whole is in a slump."

In March, the SIA assumed an even more contorted public posture by rejecting calls from watchdog groups—and an SIA task force—for a comprehensive health study of the chipmaking industry. Why? Because the SIA's board doubted whether the public would accept an SIA-sponsored study as objective. The SIA, tossing reason aside, instead recommended that semiconductor firms perform their own, isolated studies. But in a prior episode, both the SIA and its member firms had established their disdain for impartial inquiry, as well as their capacity for skullduggery.

By 1980 the occupational illness rate for Silicon Valley semiconductor workers (1.3 illnesses per 100 workers) was over three times that for manufacturing workers (.04/100). Compiled from a California Department of Industrial Relations (CDIR) survey, the high illness rate included managers and nonproduction employees and thus understated the danger. The rate also discounted latent disorders, miscarriages,

**By simply changing the way it recorded injuries and illnesses, the semiconductor industry produced an apparent two-thirds drop in its occupational illness rate.**

and birth defects, as well as the special wear and tear exacted by this stressful work.

The industry's high illness rate prompted reviews and planned studies by the California OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), and, on a federal level, by NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health). In response the SIA "decided to re-evaluate" (as an SIA lawyer put it) the way it recorded chemical "incidents." By simply changing the way it recorded injuries and illnesses, the industry produced an apparent two-thirds drop in its occupational illness rate. Under equally mysterious circumstances, the government agencies planning the studies were dissuaded from conducting them.

The SIA's revisionism—and the government's reluctance to challenge it—allowed the companies to avoid a legal obligation to report many work-related illnesses. This helped establish a secular trend of declining occupational illness data that could later be used as evidence against disabled workers' legal claims. Now, the unpublished DEC study, which the SIA may yet seek to discredit, threatens to arm disabled workers with new evidence against the industry's ill-gotten innocence.

NIOSH, according to the *Globe*, has requested a copy of the DEC study and is "considering launching a federal health study of the semiconductor industry." California health officials, too, are under pressure to conduct research into Silicon Valley electronics plants. But these are dubious enterprises. In February the *Wall Street Journal* reported on the progress of a \$450,000 on-again, off-again VDT (Video Display Terminal) hazards study by NIOSH. BellSouth Corp., an Atlanta-based telephone company, enjoined NIOSH scientists from asking employees about "their fertility history [sic] or their perception of occupational stress, a potential cause of miscarriages." When NIOSH insisted on the relevance

of these questions to the study, BellSouth contacted the White House, whose Office of Management and Budget then "threatened to block funding for the study unless the questions were dropped." NIOSH relented, thus impairing the VDT study. This retreat signaled a servility to capital's friends in high places that would likely blemish any NIOSH examination of the semiconductor industry workplace. California health officials, according to the *San Jose Mercury News*, are citing bare budgets and industry intransigence as excuses not to study health problems in the clean room. "Industry is key to the success of the study," according to the state's chief of epidemiological studies. Government agencies remain an unlikely ally for labor. The industry is biding its time.

In the aftermath of the Hudson plant study, some three dozen organizations ranging from the Santa Clara Center for Occupational Safety and Health (SCCOSH) to IBM Workers United and the Environmental Defense Fund, as well as union activists and officials, sent an open letter to semiconductor firms and drafted a position paper on "Health and Safety in the Semiconductor Industry." The groups are asking the industry to "remove toxics, not workers" from the workplace. They also charge that exclusionary policies such as AT&T's are short-sighted and possibly in violation of federal laws that forbid employment discrimination on the basis of sex or pregnancy.

For more information on reproductive and other hazards in the high-tech workplace, call the Confidential Reproductive Hazards Hotline (408) 998-4050 or (800) 4242-USA. For copies of Silicon Valley Toxic News, contact the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, 277 West Hedding St. #208, San Jose, CA 95110 or call (408) 287-6707.

—Dennis Hayes

## A Day Older, A Dollar Poorer!

In PW #15 "Fire and Ice" covered a strike at Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Company in California. The strike began Sept. 3, 1985 when the company slashed wages from an average of \$6.66 to \$4.75 an hour, as well as many other take-aways (dues checkoff, vacation pay for seasonal workers, etc.). The workers are represented by Teamsters Local 912, were mostly Hispanic women, and struck after an 800-1 vote. The company used legal injunctions and cops in its attempt to keep operating, but was unsuccessful. Workers refused to cross the picket lines, and the Watsonville community supported the strike.

Despite the international union's lack of support, the strike continued for 18 months, with the workers running the finances, publicity, child-care and solidarity actions. Scabs were paid \$5.15/hr. but the company was never able to reach normal

production. Finally, in February of 1987 Wells Fargo bank began foreclosure proceedings against the now desperate company (owing over \$7 million). A group of creditors, mostly growers in the area, formed NORCAL Frozen Foods and bought the plant. They immediately re-opened negotiations, offering improved wages (\$5.85/hr., now the prevailing union wage in the area). The union officials approved, but the workers refused to ratify the offer, in particular because of inadequate medical coverage. Although the union cut off strike benefits and announced that the strike was over, the rank-and-file had a different idea and went back out on the picket lines. Five days later, the new owners gave in to the workers' medical demands as well as their demands for seniority rights and amnesty for strikers (which was tantamount to dismissing the scabs). This contract was ratified by 543-21. The plant is now operating again, with full production expected by autumn '87. Although the new owners appear to be an improvement it remains to be seen if they will follow words with actions.

So, after 18 months of poverty, millions of dollars drained out of a tiny community, numerous arrests and evictions, it's back to business as usual. The workers accepted a dollar an hour less, and otherwise are about where they were a year and a half ago. The company, however, not only didn't get its way, it went bankrupt. The workers gained an intangible benefit—they refused to give up, and broke their immediate enemy. Facing union busting and take-backs from the largest cannery in the U.S., a combative spirit and enduring tenacity carried the day.

—Primitivo Morales

## TIES

*for Judy Wapp and David Everest*

If you look closely at those who speak about "our flag" or "our country" you'll observe they have one thing in common: they wear ties. In each sector of the globe this is the same: before they get you to kill for them, or suffer for them, or hate for them they put on a tie, pick up the speech somebody else was paid to write, step to a microphone and start. Ties are the real flags of such people. The few women or priests among them dress in an equally recognizable manner. But ties let them identify their counterparts in different geographic areas. Later, after the war or the crisis or the trade dispute it will be revealed that the men and women of the ties made lots of money through deals in the other region while they were buying and selling the lives of the rest of us or the products we create at work or the minerals or crops found locally. Then the ties begin to flap about the "natural historic friendship between our two great peoples" until the time comes to seal a border again, recall ambassadors (who you'll note also wear ties) and energetically wave the flags. But always the first allegiance these talkers pledge to in the morning is their ties.

On the plaza at the United Nations building in New York instead of flagpole after flagpole displaying the massed banners of the globe they should run up the world's ties: board of director ties, central committee ties, senior administrative staff ties. This would give a more accurate picture to the tours of school kids or anyone else attempting to grasp what goes on around the planet.

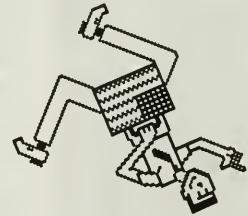
Or, Neruda had a better scheme: every household, each family should fly their own flag. Every group or organization so inclined. Some would be more elaborate than others, some especially imaginative. All sorts of devices, slogans, shapes, trim. Under such circumstances, if a tie so much as breathes the word "fatherland" or "motherland" the evidence will be visible to everybody: we are many, not one. Individuals, not a herd. Differences, solidarities, uniquenesses. And we might choose other groupings than at present. A majority of flags could even decide to end the tieocracy, the rule by these treacherous little scraps of cloth.

**Tom Wayman**

## grievance

the sexual electricity at my workplace is so absent that I get backaches that surge up & down my spine they make my cock hard I will fill the void with my whole being I will couple with the corporate body our children will look like stock certificates

**William Talcott**



## SHIVERING INTO THE FUTURE

If they can store a human embryo on ice for four days in a lab where's the surprise when they freeze a paycheck for seven weeks in a computer? The death of emotion was no immaculate conception. Lenny Tristano was 30 years ahead of his time, the Birth of the Cool was a baby that grew up like Topsy on steroids, and now we've got a new cold mode of delay no other society's ever equaled.

**Tom Clark**

## WRITE SOON

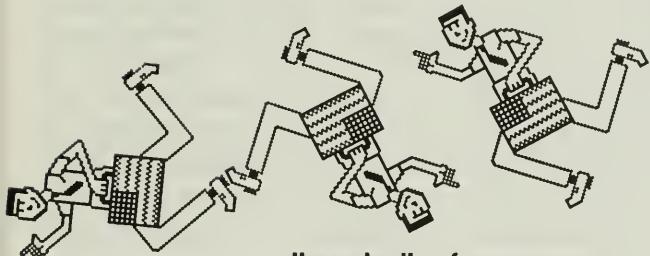
You're not interested in ordinary people  
but in those fucked up to an  
extraordinary degree. Tentativeness and caution  
aren't synonymous, so you have a point.  
Boarding the bus before dawn, we were seatmates  
who talked about politics, God, work, music and women  
—got off at a rest stop and wound up  
stranded someplace that wasn't even on the map.  
Two people nervously scanning a lonely depot.

Walking like a cat aware of a sleeping junkyard dog  
measuring your sentences like pieces of adhesive tape  
fluffing the cushion of every received idea  
but not making it comfortable enough to rest on  
I remarked that you remind me of me, when I was learning  
how to be a homosexual, and failing the course.  
You laughed, of course, and we left the depot  
for the light from a nearby diner.

With love, from America.

November, 1986

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## the velocity of money

"when money moves slowly  
the economy slows down"  
—time magazine

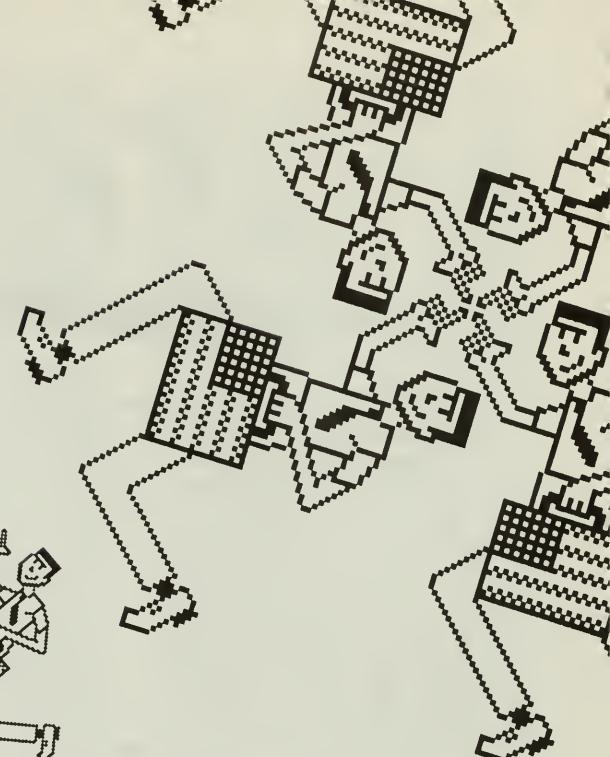
large coins fall from the money plant  
I throw pennies from the back window  
at the cats near the fish pond

the speed of money has been known  
to reach seven miles a second  
that was before  
electronic fund transfer techniques

now money moves so fast  
a lot of it manages to escape gravity  
thats why my salary goes up so slowly

if they gave me more money  
instead of sending it off into space  
I would contribute  
to the velocity of money here on earth  
I promise you

William Talcott



## LUMPED ON THE BOWERY

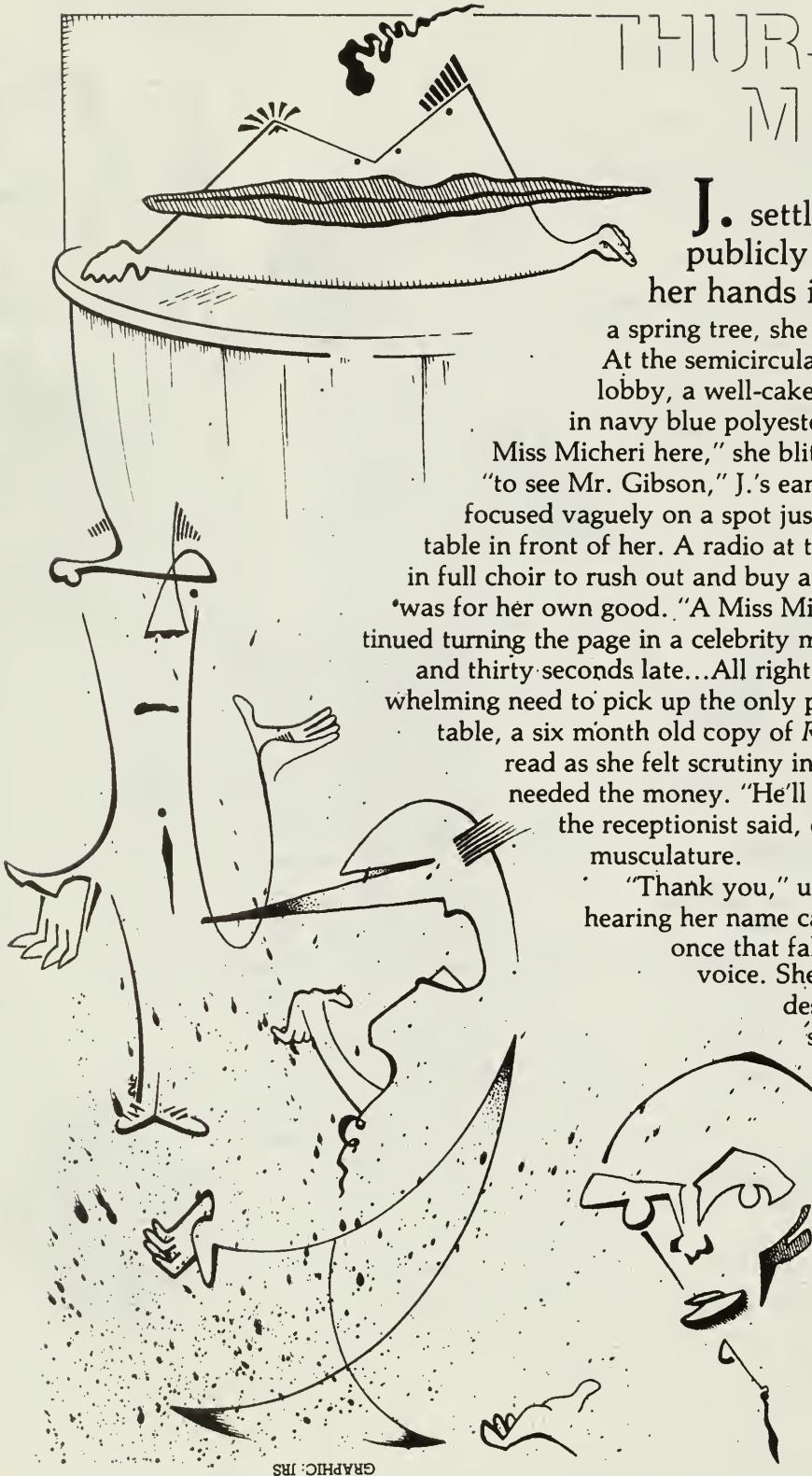
The 42 year old slit eyed wino,  
jailed in Manhattan for life  
without parole or sex or hope  
in solitary confinement,  
wine soaked his brain cells on the street alone  
and paint soaked canvas in his Bowery room.  
Billy the Psychedelic Wino  
a refugee from the old storms on St. Marks  
told him his stuff was as good as Picasso's.

Last year an analyst came  
from the welfare department.  
She recommended he sober up  
& pursue his talent more vigorously.

He had some one wino showings  
& his paintings began to collect  
in Park Avenue penthouses.  
He moved into a Soho loft  
where models competed for the stroke of his brush,  
& he danced with the people at Studio 54 & ate at Elaine's  
until a Gucci trodden exhibition  
on the Upper East Side,  
where a sly critic in a Brooks Brothers suit  
spotted similarities to the sketches  
received by the Pope at Easter  
from armless veterans taught by therapists  
to hold brushes between their teeth.

Joseph Ratta

# THURSDAY MORNING



J. settled into a slightly rough, publicly tough couch and folded her hands in her lap. Like a bird in a spring tree, she soaked.

At the semicircular command post that faced the lobby, a well-caked receptionist, tightly wrapped in navy blue polyester, pressed her buttonis. "Yes, a Miss Micheri here," she blithely mispronounced Mackery, "to see Mr. Gibson," J.'s ears hung for the volley. Her eyes focused vaguely on a spot just below the center of the coffee table in front of her. A radio at the receptionist's post urged her in full choir to rush out and buy a truck as quickly as possible. It was for her own good. "A Miss Mickernini," the receptionist continued turning the page in a celebrity magazine. "She was two minutes and thirty seconds late...All right." At this point, J. felt an overwhelming need to pick up the only piece of reading material on the table, a six month old copy of *Real Estate Plus*, and pretend to read as she felt scrutiny in the air. She wanted a job. She needed the money. "He'll be down in just a few minutes, the receptionist said, careful not to disturb her facial musculature.

"Thank you," uttered J. concealing the sting of hearing her name casually garbled and realizing at once that falseness could be detected in her voice. She thought better of her creeping desire for a cigarette. That would surely be an unwelcome sign of nervousness or haughtiness.

Two minutes and thirty seconds late? She opened the magazine to "The Five Hottest Sub-division Financing Techniques—and Why."

GRAPHIC: IRS

A harmonious and subdued electronic pulse, signaling an incoming phone call and a new age in technology, pressed from the switchboard. The receptionist took a deep, long drag on a cigarette. She pressed a button. "Great American United National Real Estate." She took a drag. Exhaling, "Who's calling?" In the background, J. noticed weighty blurbs now coming over the radio. Jeff the Weatherman was speculating about radiation from a Russian nuclear power plant meltdown reaching town. Then a marching band boomed out a tune for frozen orange juice that either had a lot of pulp or only a little, J. couldn't tell, but she knew that the amount of pulp was important. She reached into her coat pocket to make sure, just in case, that she hadn't locked her keys in her car. No, she had them. And what was this? A peanut M&M. What a great surprise. She brought it to her mouth in a closed fist and, pretending to clear her throat, popped it in. No way would she chew it, she promised herself. Not only would chewing be entirely unacceptable before a job interview, but concentrating on the sweetness of the candy secretly melting in her mouth would be a kind of private meditation in order to preserve her sense of self in a belittling situation. Things were going well. She needed that job.

"No, he's not at his desk right now," the receptionist dragged in a good and proper lie. "No, he doesn't see applicants. The first thing you want to do is send a copy of your resume to Personnel and they'll take it from there... Whatever is necessary, I'm sure." J. sank a little with the person on the other end of the line but couldn't help feeling just a wee bit superior for at least having gotten in the door. She imagined herself in just a few years running a good chunk of the place, being kind and understanding to her secretary, and going home to a fabulously remodeled kitchen. "No, no he doesn't... No, no... No, he's one of the biggest and not many people get to, eh... Yes, yes you may." At last a positive token signaled impending conclusion. It came with "Uh huh." J. was intrigued. One of the biggest what? She almost smirked openly at her first thought, which was quickly followed by a decision to fire that receptionist as soon as she was in charge.

Just then two men in dark blue suits walked in tandem through the reception area. "No, we're the victims here," one was arguing. "But this is the real world," protested the other. As they passed the receptionist, she closed her eyes and groaned to herself, loudly enough to be heard by the executives.

"Just swimming," thought J. "Must be a temp. What kind of place is this, anyway?" She allowed her eyes to dart rapidly around the lobby, which seemed to open onto many more corridors than she had

noticed when she came in. There was a whole catacomb of corridors, basically in shadow but with shafts of sunlight occasionally beaming yellow rectangles onto the glossy linoleum floor. Suddenly she realized that she was slouching, and as she worked herself up straight, she found herself hoping that the receptionist wasn't on such terms with her prospective boss that she could report such sloppiness to him. She leaned forward to replace the magazine on the table.

"You just stay in your seat, young lady," snapped the receptionist, just like Mrs. Mandell, The Walrus, had once done in the eighth grade when J. had only wanted to go to the bathroom. And suddenly lurching forward, the receptionist cracked with a squeaky-door creak like the Wicked Witch of the West, "And don't even think about stealing any of our paperclips while you're here, like the rest of them. We count 'em." Apparently pleased with the shock she must have been able to see on J.'s face, she let loose a shrill cackle that sent chills through J. She was flabbergasted. How could this be happening in the corporate world? Maybe the receptionist was just trying to be funny, the cluck. But maybe she herself was overreacting. She had gotten up much earlier than usual and stayed up late with Ted "When We Come Back" Koppel and the Experts. Radiation was seeping into Russia and mixing with the world's winds. Even if it posed no immediate danger to America, she still felt threatened and undermined by something ominous, something basically inimical to life, something entirely mysterious. It must be that she hadn't gotten enough sleep and was dulled and on edge. Yet the receptionist was cackling loudly. The whole building would hear. Could she put up with having to bid good morning to this woman five days a week for months to come? What was she willing to do for money?

The two men in blue suits walked back across the lobby, alternating rapidly with "No, yours very truly," and "No, very truly yours," over and over again, walking in purposeful rapture back into the corporate thought mines. J. suddenly remembered that she had made a special effort that morning to remember to take with her a clean handkerchief, as this was spring, and her mother had taught her long ago that a young lady was always prepared during hayfever season with a handkerchief. What a comforting scene she was able to draw up from safe suburban days gone by, of a sunny fenced yard brimming with bright yellow forsythia, patches of shade dancing on cool tufts of green grass beneath a huge, friendly old oak.

Two men J. had not seen before, again in blue suits, were loitering at the edge of the lobby. "Cost-effective," determined one. "Efficiency report," tittered the other, over

and over with a compulsive rhythm. "Help," sounded a little voice in the back of J.'s mind. She wanted to be warm in bed on a cold night, watching a favorite rerun on the late show. "Business as usual," she thought more loudly to herself, settling back in resignation, when suddenly the woman behind the desk pulled out a great, frosty mug of beer, guzzled it entirely without pausing, and belched like a drunken sailor. She picked at a speck of lint on her blouse. She turned up the radio. A news blurring personality was interviewing an expert on radiation, but they were talking about Soviet ice cream. It was rather good, they decided.

Could this be the start of the apocalypse? Could it come in mounting nibbles of chaos, slipping largely unnoticed into a catastrophic crescendo increasingly out of hand? Could the end of the world catch everybody off guard? Was it a mistake to accept images of stability in everyday life? What if everything known—the children, the trees, the beggars, the cities, television, Mother Theresa—all were suddenly shuffled and redealt beyond the verge and over the brink? Terrorism. The space shuttle. South Africa. Depleted ozone. Nuclear disaster. Bombs. AIDS. Unable to find matching shoes for her favorite new paisley spring print.

From the radio there came an interview with a Soviet functionary. He seemed to be saying that John Lennon had been shot, but the chanting of the businessmen kept her from making out what was going on. Her head swirled. Would there never be a prince to save her from all this? What would it all amount to if this were suddenly It? Was global disaster going to snuff



GRAPHIC: R.S.

her out before she had even started on her dreams? All those lost possibilities.

A fat man in a dark brown suit was shoving a young man in a light grey suit into the lobby, almost forcing him to the floor. "Evans, your failure to change that one to a two cost this company a great deal of money and credibility. Not only are you fired, but I want to see your ass in the parking lot at five o'clock so I can kick it, and kick it hard." He dragged Evans by the shoulder to the doors. Evans, obviously greatly embarrassed by the severity of his blunder, resisted only to the extent that was necessary to remain generally upright. Shoved out of the door, he was thus disposed of. The fat man now began bellowing, apparently at J., from behind. She sprang to her feet and turned to face him as he huffed on a brutally foul cigar, fists clenched at his side. "We're waiting for your urinalysis test," he gritted. "Now!" How horrible to be treated to such menacing before an interview, and by such a presumptuous, insubstantial, suburban jerk. Would they find evidence of the two tokes she had taken at a party two months ago? This was really beneath dignity. J. was speechless. What if she couldn't go? Would everyone in the lobby be allowed to know? Should she just walk out without saying another word or make some kind of protest? She wondered if she'd be able to get in the last word and score a victory. Then she remembered her gaping need for a paycheck. The receptionist, somehow having managed to change into a nurse's white uniform, stepped up to the fat man, and, snapping tightly on a little wad of gum, cooed, for J.'s benefit, into his ear, "And if she doesn't turn in her blue book by three, she's got to go to the basement. Not much sun down there."

The blue book! J. was gripped by panic. She hadn't even started to write in the blue book. How much time was there left? How could she write intelligently now? She would probably need an A to get the job. How could she get an A now? How demeaning it was for a person as vulgar as this receptionist to hold sway over whether she was to get a job. This was horrible. And all she could think of was her mechanic who smiled too much, the ongoing need to have her car tuned and the extra thirteen dollars it cost her to bounce her last rent check. The commotion around her was rising. Two secretaries now installed themselves behind her in the lobby, giggling about how going to "SB colon two thirty eight" got them "wiped out." She wasn't able to follow what was going on.

A man in grimy overalls strode into the lobby and walked right up to her with a credit card form, ready to sign, on a dirty little plastic tray. He extended it to her with a cheap ball-point pen and said with a smile, "two hundred and forty

dollars, Miss, and three cents. Hey, that's pretty good. We don't hardly ever get no orders that end in three cents." She knew she didn't have that kind of money. And what was he doing here? Had she called him for emergency road service? She had to run. She knew she couldn't abandon her appointment if she was to have any hope of getting the job, but she could stand it no longer and dashed into the nearest corridor, a lump swelling in her throat. "You think they can even tell they're gettin' radiation?" she heard coming over the walls of a cubicle. She rounded a corner. Sensing that they must be close behind, and painfully aware that she was not wearing the requisite visitor's badge, she dodged through a pair of service doors and found herself running down a dirt road heading across a wide weedy field, just as from the parking lot to her right there came a swell of passionless violins from loudspeakers atop tall metal poles, playing easy listening music twenty-four hours a day. There was a railroad crossing just ahead, the bells were beginning to clang, the gates were coming down. A great freight train with four locomotives was rumbling up from the plains beyond. J. noticed the receptionist at her desk, apparently on wheels, now parked in front of the gate, still in a nurse's uniform. "Only another hour to hand in that blue book or it's to the basement with you," she hollered just before a few warning blasts from the train whistle. "Not much sun down there." And again came her insane cackling against the rising throbbing of the approaching engines.

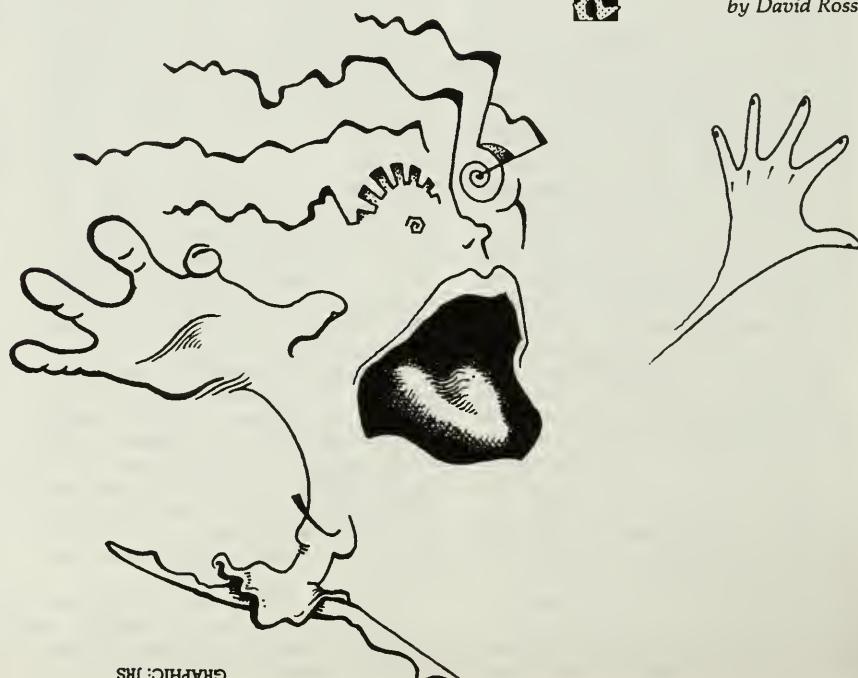
The blue book, J. couldn't remember

where she had left the blue book. It must be back in the lobby. She had been fighting off sleep the whole morning. What else might she have missed? The blue book. Surely she couldn't ask for another one at this point. The receptionist would think that she was trying to cheat. She hadn't even studied. What were the questions? What could she write about? Would they all know that she was just faking it when she finally failed to hand in the blue book? She wasn't really qualified to work as a word processor. Would she ever get a job? The train whistle was blaring.

J. decided to lie down on the grass, just for five minutes, and look at the sky. "Just five minutes," she thought, "then I'll go back to the lobby and straighten this whole thing out." As soon as she had begun to doze off, the train roared thunderously by. J. sat up straight with a start. A news report was being intoned on her bedside clock-radio. Iodine tablets were being given to children in Poland. What was this happening? Where? The time, the announcer said, was nineteen minutes past the hour. She looked at the clock. The day was just beginning. The blue book! There was no need to turn in the blue book! No blue book. A wave of relief washed over her. She let her head hit the pillow. "Five more minutes," she thought, turning up the radio to make sure she wouldn't drift off too far. She had to be on time for that interview. She needed a job. She gazed over at the spot on the wall where the paint had chipped away, leaving a shape that always reminded her of Iceland. "Just five more minutes."



by David Ross



GRAPHIC: MRS

# Small Is Not Beautiful

## Life at the Bay Guardian

—TALE OF TOIL—

**I**t's 9:00 Friday night. The last stragglers from the editorial department have departed. The other typesetter and I have the Bay Guardian building to ourselves. Two piles of manila folders sit on the typesetting machine, to my left. They contain the order slips for classified ads. One pile gradually dwindles as the folders are moved to the other pile, marking my progress. The machine occasionally clanks as it changes typestyle or size.

"Love is friendship caught fire!" appears at the top of the video screen. Ah, yes. The relationships section. This, the fattest of the file folders, should keep my fingers busy for the rest of my 9-10-hour-long shift. When I first began typesetting the classifieds, I found the relationships section sort of poignant. "All those people out there looking to connect with somebody." I thought about the care some people take in choosing just the right words. But as the Friday nights came and went, I soon became jaded and the words slipped through my fingers in a blur.

The San Francisco Bay Guardian was founded by Bruce Brugmann and his wife, Jean Dibble, in 1966. Unlike other alternative papers of that era, such as the *Berkeley Barb* and the *L.A. Free Press*, the BG wasn't counter-cultural. Nor did it follow the political currents of the '60s New Left, as did the *National Guardian* in New York. Brugmann's journalistic background was in the commercial dailies.

Nonetheless, the *Bay Guardian* has always had political pretensions, and its pages uphold various leftist causes—environmental protection, abortion rights, rent control,

unions, anti-Manhattanization—and expose monopolistic abuses. To the BG "politics" is primarily a matter of elections, and, thus, of the politicians who control the top-down machinery of American government. The paper has been supportive of such groups as Democratic Socialists of America, Berkeley Citizens Action, and Tom Hayden's now-defunct Campaign for Economic Democracy.

In 1971 the *Bay Guardian* was "a chronically struggling business," writes James Brice, "with a spare 17,000 subscribers paying for the four issues it managed to publish" that year. "Dibble and Brugmann hoped the paper could make money," says Brice, "if it went weekly" but they lacked the necessary capital. Ironically, they got it from their archrivals, the big dailies.

Like a number of other papers in the Bay Area, the BG had filed an antitrust suit in the late 60's against the two remaining dailies in San Francisco, the Hearst-owned *Examiner* and the *Chronicle*. The two dailies had merged their advertising and production operations, an action authorized by the Newspaper Preservation Act of 1965, which granted a special antitrust exemption to daily newspapers.

In May 1975, Brugmann and Dibble dropped their lawsuit in exchange for an out-of-court settlement of \$500,000. (The lawyers got about \$200,000.) This was a rather shrewd move as the papers that pursued the lawsuit to the end (such as the *Pacific Sun*) eventually lost.

When the BG became a free weekly in the late '70s, the larger circulation and weekly schedule enabled the paper to capture a growing share of the Bay Area

**We asked: "When is the Bay Guardian going to protect its own VDT workers?" A BG manager replied: "Soon." Two years later glare shields still hadn't arrived.**

advertising market. Although advertising by the major local retailers (Macy's, Emporium Capwell, etc.) remains safely in the pocket of the big dailies, the BG's increased circulation made it attractive to national advertisers, and the full-page ads for cigarettes and liquor contributed considerably to BG revenue. The paper made its first profit in fiscal 1982. From January 1982 to January 1985 the paper's classified ad lineage increased from 20 cents to 60 cents, this means the paper's classified ad revenue increased by approximately 495%. And in 1984 management increased the print-run of its entertainment section to 100,000 copies, and then jacked up the rates for entertainment advertising.

The BG's craven reliance on business advertising necessarily shapes its editorial direction. The packet distributed to potential advertisers candidly admits this: 'The *Guardian* tailors its editorial material to [an] audience' of 24-to-36-year-old 'self-involved consumers.' "EXPOSE YOURSELF! to 180,000 hot young professionals with money to burn." Certain issues each year were planned out in advance so as to appeal to specific segments of the business community (consumer electronics, wine, etc.)

Despite the BG's new-found profitability and ever-growing production pressures, wages remained low. In 1982 production artists and proofreaders were paid about \$5.50 per hour. By 1985 the rate had inched up from \$6.00 to \$6.50. Typesetters were paid \$5.50 when I was hired in 1982; today the starting rate is \$7.50. Pay for clerical and sales staff in Classified was approximately the same.

It was considered a privilege to work in Editorial but pay in that department was, if anything, even lower. Editorial staff is paid a salary, which enables the BG to avoid overtime pay. At the end of 1984, the copy editor was making the equivalent of \$6.50 an hour, while some editorial staffers were paid even less. Early in 1985, the woman hired to compile the weekly entertainment listings had been assured a four-day week for \$150. But she found that the job required a 40-hour week, and so she decided to have a chat with Alan Kay, the managing editor. "Am I going to get paid for Fridays?" she asked. Alan put his head in his hands, then looked up at her. "How about a restaurant meal?" he asked plaintively. Her pay amounted to less than \$4 per hour.

#### ENTER DISTRICT 65

I was hired in 1982 towards the end of a year-long effort to organize the staff into District 65. District 65, a union of textile and dry goods wholesale workers originally founded by Communists in the '30s, has organized publishing industry workers in New York City in recent years. Here in San Francisco, District 65, now affiliated to the United Auto Workers

(UAW), is the union of the *Mother Jones* staff.

Low pay and lack of any say in decisions seemed to be the two main areas of concern among BG workers. When management learned that members of the staff were trying to persuade co-workers to join a union, a meeting was called. Brugmann ranted about how unions would MEAN "outside control" of the paper.

On the issue of low pay, management pleaded poverty. Members of the staff responded by asking what salaries management were getting. If the paper's finances are limited, a number of staffers thought, then management salaries should be reduced to allow raises for the lowest paid. But BG management refused to tell us how much money managers were taking out of the paper.

About this time a meeting with a representative of District 65 was held for BG workers. The issues of the paper's editorial direction and its increasing subservience to advertisers were raised, along with the idea of lowering management salaries so as to raise workers' pay. "Unions can't take on issues of editorial content, or ask that managers' salaries be lowered," Dibble asserted.

What she was getting at is that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and courts cannot require employers to negotiate these issues. But just because the government won't compel an employer to negotiate contested issues doesn't mean unions can't raise them. A workers organization can try to fight for anything it

wants to. What workers can achieve ultimately depends upon the power they can bring to bear on the situation. This is affected by such factors as internal cohesion among the workers and support in the community. This is true even for issues that employers are nominally required by law to negotiate, such as wages, hours and benefits. The government can't be counted on to support workers' demands.

Some members of the BG staff were dissatisfied with District 65's rather narrow, legalistic approach. What was needed was an independent organization, some of us thought, an organization that we could control directly. An independent group did continue for a while, but eventually stopped meeting. Nonetheless, a pattern of solidarity and mutual consultation had been established and continued informally.

#### THE STRIKE IN 1976

As the District 65 organizing drive fizzled out, about a dozen people quit. This was not the first BG unionization attempt. The first such effort led to an NLRB vote in December 1975, which certified the Bay Area Typographical Union (ITU) and the Newspaper Guild as the recognized unions at the paper.

Staff pay had been very low in the early '70s—base rates then ranged from \$2.50 to \$3.75 per hour. Benefits were nonexistent. A long-standing graffiti in the employees' lavatory had the words "Guardian health plan" inked in large letters, with an arrow pointing to a draw-

Continued from last issue



Excerpted from "This Modern World," a full-length work available for \$3 from Processed World.

ing of a book. The book was entitled "Holy Bible."

In its early days the paper had an informal atmosphere and lines of authority were rather vague—not unusual at small "start-up" companies. Then came the \$300,000 from the anti-trust settlement. "The deathly poor newspaper that had shared its poverty with its beggarly staff now seemed richly endowed," writes James Brice.\*

But decisions about what to do with the money were quickly made by those at the top, before staffers had a chance to have any say over what should be done with it. Money was poured into new typesetting equipment and a down-payment on a building. "The settlement made us feel more left out of the decision-making process," recalled Katy Butler (now a *Chronicle* reporter). At the same time, the change to a weekly schedule meant increased production pressures.

Though staffers were concerned about the low wages and lack of benefits or job security, these issues were "secondary to job satisfaction and worker participation in decision-making," according to Brice. "A union seemed to be a sure way to gain leverage." Hence the vote for the ITU and Newspaper Guild.

After six months of table-pounding negotiations, the union reduced its wage demand to 25 cents per hour across-the-board. Employees also wanted one week

notice of termination, an agreed grievance procedure, limited sick pay, and pay for overtime. But the BG refused these demands, and in June of '76, 21 employees, both full-time and part time walked out. The bitter strike—marked by vandalism and sabotage—dragged on for eight months.

Recently, Bruce Brugmann has described this struggle as an attempt by "the unions from the local newspaper monopoly...to impose their standard contract on a struggling, competitive, independent small business."\* The concerns of the workers thus disappear, they become non-entities. Funny how he was no less opposed, in 1982 to District 65, which has no contracts at the "monopoly" dailies.

#### INFORMAL SOLIDARITY

Informal solidarity, as I mentioned, had continued to exist in the wake of the District 65 organizing drive even though no on-going organization had gotten entrenched at the BG. This was necessary to deal with the BG's arbitrary management practices. An incident in 1984 illustrates this.

The BG advertises its job openings in the classified section of the paper each week. The BG Employee Manual states that notice of openings must be posted and current employees given preference. However, while typesetting the BG job ads one week, the typesetters came across an

advertisement for an ad designer.

But the BG already had an ad designer, a Japanese immigrant who had done the job for a number of years. Management had tried to demote him a couple of years before, but then backed down. Anyway, a group of artists and typesetters protested the running of this ad, but our boss disclaimed responsibility for this violation of written policy and past guarantees. Some time that weekend the job ad disappeared from the classified page flats and the ad was erased from computer disk.

BG management were not very happy about this sabotage, we heard, and rumors of firings were in the air. "If they fire anyone, we should all go on strike," one woman remarked to me. I think quite a few production staff members felt that way. However, a meeting was held and we were reassured that no demotion was going to take place. At the same time, four people were singled out for written warnings about "tampering with the work product."

In the wake of this incident some of us met with a business agent from the Graphic Communications Union (GCU). The press operators at the shop where the BG was printed belong to this union. If we ever went on strike, we knew that the first thing we'd want to do would be to appeal to the press operators to refuse to print the paper.

The business agent gave us a copy of the printing industry master contract,

\* "A look back at the strike nobody won,"  
Mediafile, June, 1973

\* Bill Mandel's column, SF Examiner, Oct. 29, 1986.



which some of us discussed later. The worst clause in the contract stated: 'There will be no strike or other economic pressure through concerted action by the employees and/or the union.' In other words, workers' hands are tied while any beefs inch through the bureaucratic grievance machinery to final arbitration. 'But the only way we are able to get anything around here is through collective pressure,' one BG staffer commented.

The contract also stipulated that dues be deducted from the employees' paychecks and then sent directly to the union. In decades past, dues were not deducted and shop stewards had to go around hustling the members' dues, which gave members the opportunity to push their concerns directly.

Why couldn't BG employees remain independent and still appeal to the press operators to not print the paper in the event of a strike? Another clause in the press operators' contract explains the problem: 'Employees...shall not be required to cross a picket line because of a strike if sanctioned by the Central Labor Council...' This means the printers are not allowed to take action to support a strike—such as refusing to print a struck paper—without the approval of the top local AFL-CIO officials. Without such sanction, the printers would be at risk of losing their jobs. The purpose of this sort of contract is to ensure that workers solidarity is controlled by top officials rather than the workers themselves. The employers gain by the union's promise not to disrupt production and the officials gain control over the labor movement.

In their June 6, 1984 issue the BG published an expose by Loren Stein and Laurie Fink on the health hazards associated with work on video display terminals (VDTs). "In the U.S. and Europe," Stein and Fink reported, "40% to 80% of VDT operators responding to medical surveys have reported they suffer from eyestrain, chronic headaches, back pain, blurred vision and other ailments. VDT operators have also been the single largest source of health complaints received by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) during the past few years."

In her women's health column in that same issue, Alice Wolfson wrote: "A 1981 study of VDT operators conducted by [NIOSH] found that clerical workers using VDTs had the highest occupational stress ever recorded, higher even than air traffic controllers." The BG had also published an earlier article on this same topic, "VDTs and Health," in August 1983. This series of articles appeared around the time Tom Hayden

Even if the bureaucratic AFL-CIO-type unions encourage little *real* solidarity between workers in different workplaces, small groups of workers will tend to seek the protection of these unions because they offer at least the promise of greater leverage, however illusory this may be. This tendency is likely to prevail until there emerges an independent workers movement that can provide an alternative for groups of workers seeking a larger movement to ally with.

### OBSTACLES TO WORKER ORGANIZATION

The BG has been able to maintain a "union-free environment" and contain periodic bouts of disaffection through a combination of circumstances. For one thing, many BG staffers are employed part-time. I've overheard the production manager say to a prospective new hire, "This job is just to get some extra money." When people have another job, they are less likely to regard the part-time job as important enough to commit time to organizing with others. A workforce becomes fragmented as part-timers predominate. When people don't see each other regularly, if at all, they develop less of the cohesion that is natural to a group of people who work together, and which is necessary for collective action.

The large number of part-timers lowers BG labor costs. Less than half of the production staff worked the minimum 30 hours a week needed to qualify for health insurance. Low wages, minimal benefits and lousy conditions tend to produce turnover. While I worked at the BG, the

average production employee stayed only eight months.

Organization among workers in small, low-wage business like the BG is more likely to develop when there is a broader movement with which groups of workers in particular workplaces can ally themselves. A nonbureaucratic workers movement, that is actually run by rank-and-file workers themselves, would not be as dependent on institutionalized contract bargaining to have a presence in workplaces. This would make it easier for workers to participate in the movement despite high turnover and movement from job to job.

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was an example of such a movement in the earlier decades of this century. Many of the people who worked in mines, aboard ships, on construction projects, and on farm harvests in the Western states in those years moved around from job to job. Nevertheless, the IWW was able to maintain effective organizations in a number of these industries despite the absence of a stable workforce. The movement's presence in a workplace didn't depend upon a union contract or government certification but on workers acting "in union" with each other. Workers remained members of the union no matter where they worked. And workers in one workplace were less isolated as they had a sense of being part of a larger movement. The mix of occupations and industries may be different today, but the failures of the top-down, institutionalized unions show clearly the need for a new, non-bureaucratic workers movement.

— Tom Wetzel

### OF VDTs & Hypocrisy

introduced his VDT worker health bill into the California legislature, which the BG supported editorially.

At about the same time the BG hired a new production manager who tried to revamp labor relations in her department. Staffers were invited to air their concerns at a department meeting. We typesetters, who work on VDTs, pointed out such problems as glare from overhead fluorescent lights (which causes eye-strain and headaches) and lousy chairs (which cause backaches). We proposed that the BG acquire glare shields and sturdy chairs, and that typesetters be encouraged to take frequent breaks.

The production manager agreed. We perused office furniture catalogs and found chairs in the \$150-\$180 range that were sturdy and height-adjustable. And we tracked down an inexpensive glare shield, which also guards against low-level radiation, for about \$55 each. Only two of each item were needed; the total bill would be less than \$500. We were assured that these items

would be purchased.

The BG did buy new chairs but they weren't the ones we had chosen, and, being much cheaper, soon fell apart. But the glare shields never showed. Soon typesetters posted signs near our machines, encouraging five minute breaks every hour. But these were soon taken down. We posted another sheet on the lavatory wall, asking: "When is the BG going to protect its own VDT workers?" A BG manager then taped a reply next to it stating that glare shields would be purchased soon. But two years later they still hadn't arrived.

Early in 1985 the BG acquired eight microcomputers and a \$2,000 computer-to-typesetter interface. Without warning, several typesetting and proofreading shifts were eliminated—along with several part-timers. The editorial staff now work on VDTs, and the health hazards that we typesetters pointed out in 1984 now endanger them as well.

— Tom Wetzel

# Byting Into Books

A Review of: *Cultures in Contention* (Ed. Douglas Kahn and Diane Neumaier. 1985, Seattle, Real Comet Press).

Very slick, this weighty creative-subversive activity disguised as a coffee-table picture book. There are lots of photos of troublemakers at work, of "greatest hits" leaflets (the early 70s "Jump for Jesus" poster calling for mass suicide at the Golden Gate Bridge), and of comics (story of the Yippies tossing dollar bills onto the floor of the NY Stock Exchange). There are also excellent reproductions of Hans Haacke's photomontages, Judy Baca's murals, billboards, alternative and defaced, even lesbian postcards! But back to the weighty—weighty for whom? The book lies somewhere between the turgid culture page of your local "progressive" paper and the arcane universe of de-anti-post-deep structuralmodernism art "discourse." Its essays mostly reflect efforts to produce political statements in live performance (singing, theater, demonstrations) or in the visual realm (posters, murals, displays, video, art world stuff). There is a little on writing or film and even less on popular music, though these have perhaps gotten enough coverage elsewhere. Most of the work comes out of the U.S., but there is also a good deal from places such as Nicaragua, Jamaica, Kenya, England, Japan, and Germany.

I am less interested in how the book addresses questions in the abstract, like the relation of art to politics, than in the light the book casts on the creative/political projects I have occasionally engaged in and obsessed over with friends and coworkers in the past several years. Inventive theater and props, frequent humor, irony or sarcasm, and my rediscovery that radicalism could be *fun* were all invigorating after my exit from politically correct, left Dullsville. But this is the eighties, baby; every firing, every fiction, every authoritarian insult, every new "theatrical" invasion or bombing raid,

*cont'd. next page*

A Review of: *The Whale and the Reactor—A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology*, by Langdon Winner, University of Chicago Press, 1986.

"Writers who venture beyond the most pedestrian, dreary conceptions of tools and uses to investigate ways in which technological forms are implicated in the basic patterns and problems of our culture are often greeted with the charge that they are merely 'antitechnology' or 'blaming technology.' All who have recently stepped forward as critics in this realm have been tarred with the same idiot brush, an expression of the desire to stop a much needed dialogue rather than enlarge it. If any readers want to see the present work as 'antitechnology,' make the most of it. That is their topic, not mine."

—Langdon Winner

This is a fine, ambitious book. More than that, it's a good radical introduction to the politics of technology. It's short and reasonably well written, yet it covers all the bases, and covers them well. It does suffer a dumb title, but we'll kindly assume that the publisher forced it on Winner.

Winner begins his "search for limits" with a call for a philosophy of technology, the task of which "is to examine critically the nature and significance of artificial aids to human activity." With the technosphere supplanting the ecosphere as our most "natural" habitat, it's getting hard to see the image for the pixels. The commonplaces of technology criticism—in which the machine is taken as either neutral, evil or progressive—have long been obstacles to a deeper perspective. It's well to step back, not in the interests of academic theorizing but

*cont'd. on p. 46*

**"Are there no shared ends that matter to us any longer other than the desire to be affluent while avoiding the risk of cancer? The answer may be no."**  
—Langdon Winner

every new hysterical media outburst over sex, drugs, or disappearing kids tells me again that the mischievous little actions I engage in DONT MEAN SHIT (Now, now, another voice soothes, you never know what an action leads to...Remember Nixon swearing at his tape recorder about demonstrators ruining his "peace negotiations?").

Anyhow, I don't want to give up doing these fun projects! I just want to have a better idea of where it's all going (yes, I admit it, I still want to be politically correct!). Getting back to the book, its range of writing about oppositional art is incredibly broad and the editors' introduction was too general to make the connections I was looking for. But as I skipped around, submerged correspondences and dialogues appeared, and my favorite nagging questions popped up; these connections will be the focus of my remarks here.

For one submerged dialogue, compare the lengthy interview with Los Angeles Chicana muralist Judy Baca to Peter King's article on "underground" billboard alteration in Australia. Baca's efforts to cover southern California concrete with images of her people's journey north and their fate in the land of prosperity are amazing. By combining community and youth-organizing with pressure on state agencies for permission and funding, Baca had introduced alternative images of history and community beneath the glare of Hollywood spectacle. She and her friends have also trained a growing number of young, visual artists outside the rarified art-school world. The Australian grafittists, on the other hand, use illegal and essentially anti-state methods. Drawing on the environmental movement in Australia, they have not only attacked advertising for unhealthy goodies like cigarettes and cola but redefined advertising's "transparent" manipulation (as in the "Emperor's New Clothes") as *cultural pollution*, billboards advertising local "Eyewitness News" being an example. While more temporary than a mural, these alterations attract more attention. And though the grafittists weren't able to involve people as easily as in a mural project, they did manage to draw a considerable number of participants into an extended campaign. Its cumulative effects and the ensuing public trials further amplified their work.

Even more striking is the contrast between Abbie Hoffman's reminiscences of counterculture theater actions and the carefully plotted media events described in "Feminist Media Strategies for Political Performance." The contrast is partly one of different eras; the Hoffman piece is sixties-ish in its colorful rapid-fire description,

## IRS RULES

today the IRS ruled  
that anti-perspirants  
& recreational drugs  
can no longer be  
deducted as work-  
related expenses.

**William Talcott**

sharp observation, and superficial analysis, while the piece by Suzanne Lacy and Lucy Labowitz is pure seventies: a functional how-to guide for doing theatrical actions for media impact that aims to scientifically manipulate the media rather than short-circuit it. Hoffman's stories are a joy to read. Lacy's and Labowitz's technical summary style, however, drains away the excitement and creativity of such actions. Their distinctions between artist and activist, focus on contacting established groups already dealing with performance, and emphasis on tight organization, while being useful, practical politics, reflect the fragmentation and reformist boredom that plague us, particularly in times of political quiescence. Yet Hoffman's piece lacks the distanced reflection that one expects twenty years after an action. Both pieces focus on how a message is communicated and transformed through the medium of commercial television; in that sense both are useful to activists and troublemakers and supersede the typical, leftist unconsciousness of the theatrical aspect of a public action. Hoffman clearly shows the power of a single image, such as throwing money onto the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, but he is guilty of a sixties relapse, when he suggests that interpretation and analysis of actions/images should be left to the intellectuals.

These disputes also apply to Peter Dunn's and Loraine Leeson's "The Changing Picture of Docklands" and Tom Ward's "The Situationists Reconsidered." Dunn and Leeson describe their experience of working as political artists in conjunction with union and tenant groups fighting redevelopment in East London. They start their essay with a polemic against the widespread, leftist notion of working-masses-as-dupes-of-false-consciousness, which the left is supposed to crack with the well-aimed toss of a brilliant Marxist concept. Instead they argue for interventions that engender critical, deconstructive thought, interventions which are both visually attractive and emotionally moving. They also criticize the academic tendency to deconstruct elements of the capitalist media spectacle, which ignores actual

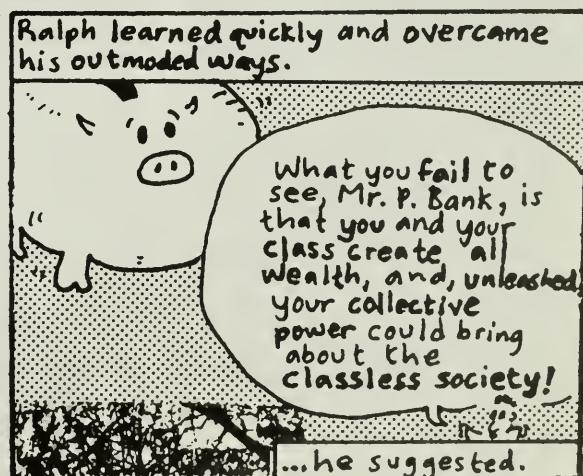
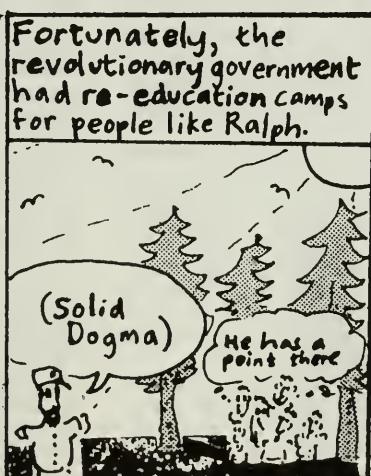
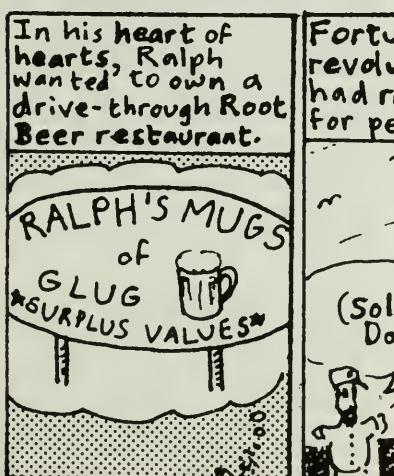
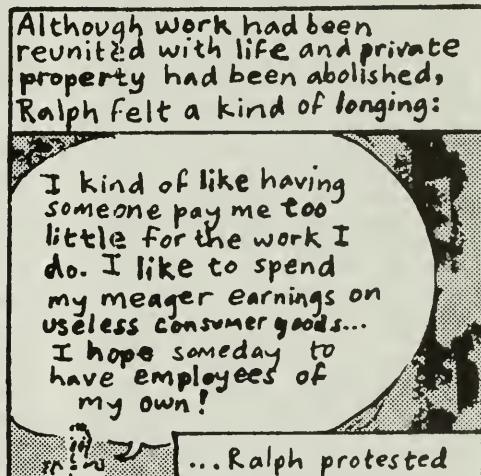
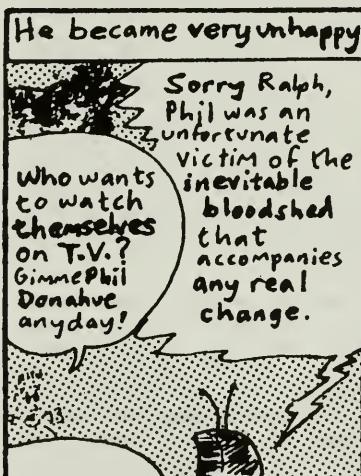
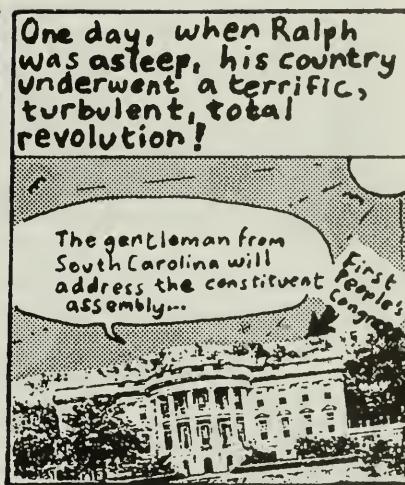
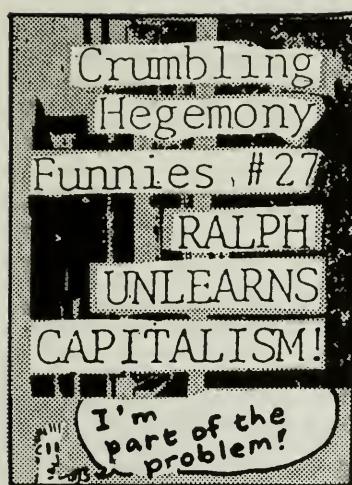
struggles when such deconstruction becomes visible.

The authors worked on a series of billboard messages, displayed in a central neighborhood location, which questioned the redevelopment process in the area. The continuity of the billboard series (reprinted in the book) attracted attention, designed as it was to be peeled, layer after layer, in a kind of metamorphosis. Their working method depended on repeated consultation with local community activists and organizations. Funding was obtained through London's Labour-dominated government (since dismantled by Thatcher). Against art-world elitism, the authors redefine their roles as servants to the cause. Artist and activist are presented as fixed categories—artsy intellectual vs. stolid leaders of the proletariat—simplistically assuming that artists are middle-class and school-trained, and activists are automatically representative of local people in struggle. Though I oversimplify their argument here, they never once deal with the bureaucratization of working people's representatives in the twentieth century, a dilemma for both Labour Party activists in Britain and labor and community activists in the U.S.

In comparison Tom Ward's essay is spicy and pungent. It attempts to summarize the history and outlook of the French Situationists and to evaluate the work of their American counterparts, particularly in the San Francisco Bay Area. In doing so, he documents *Processed World's* origins and makes some acidic observations about the U.S. left as a whole. The Situationists eschewed from the start the distinctions that Dunn and Leeson hold so dear; rather than working as "artists" with "activists," the Situationists created a kind of artistic activism, seeking to realize art in everyday life and thus surpassing the Dadaist and Surrealist projects on which they based themselves. Instead of building the norms of electoral politics into the methods, the Situationists sought to explode them, following the lead of antibureaucratic revolutions ranging from the Paris Commune of 1871 to the wildcat French general strike of May 1968. No servants of the people here; all activity is undertaken "for ourselves," and everybody else is urged to do the same by forming assemblies of self-rule rather than accepting party platforms.

Ward's piece is peppered with the drawings, mock advertisements, and promotional hoaxes produced by his comrades over the years in the brilliant and corrosive style they are known for. All these "art works" were tactically used to jolt people out of familiar routines and into some

*cont'd. on p. 46*



# BOOKS!

cont'd. from p. 44

kind of revolutionary motion. Yet, as Ward points out, scandalous propaganda rarely achieves any visible effect after its big splash. Its tactics and small-group context should be remedied, he writes, by the development of medium-range strategy, program and organization, a tantalizing notion. How such mundane, medium-range projections can be reconciled with the world-destroying absolutism of the Situationist vision is not really explained.

cont'd. from p. 43

to wake up and see straight.

We are currently, Winner says, asleep, victims of a "technological somnambulism" that has us stumbling through a fragmented chaotic and increasingly technological world with no language with which to understand it. Vast social transformations are routinely initiated with little, if any, attention given to their social meaning. The auto transforms the city, the nuke transforms war, the computer transforms everything, yet the conventional wisdom is that the tumult of mechanization is only an unfortunate collection of "side-effects." Winner's wisdom differs: "New Worlds are being made," he tells us, and "there is nothing secondary" about this phenomenon. It is, in fact, the most important accomplishment of any new technology."

Winner doesn't try to develop a full blown philosophy here. There are a few important pointers—to Wittgenstein and to Marx—but most of his effort has gone into clearing the underbrush. Winner's book is a collection of critiques: of technological determinism ("Being saddled with it is like attempting to describe all instances of sexual intercourse with only the concept of rape"), of cost/benefit analysis and its flatland language of "risks," "side effects" and "impacts," of Appropriate Technology, the Computer Revolution, Deep Ecology, and the sanitized rhetoric of Values.

In place of all these tidy systems, he invites us to stop equivocating, and simply proceed with the assumption that technology structures our societies and our lives: "In an important sense we become the beings who work on assembly lines, who talk on telephones, who do our figuring on pocket calculators, who eat processed foods, who clean our homes with powerful chemicals." He proposes that we spend our energies making finer distinctions, with politics and the quality of life as our crucial criteria.

## Do Artifacts Have Politics?

The central problem of radical technol-

ogy criticism is to understand the structuring effects of technology while at the same time avoiding determinism: to grasp artifacts as social choices, accretions of history and power. Winner does a great job, and in place of the false generalizations that litter the debate he proposes the obvious—some technologies are "inherently political" and some are not. He wants to avoid not only determinism, but denial as well. If we see humanity as swept helpless before the machine (whether to progress or pandemonium) we haven't a chance of making sense of modern life. But the un-determinism that sees technology as irrelevant to freedom and culture is just as bad, for it keeps us from seeing the "legislative" impacts of technology, the "ongoing process of world making" that is the social truth of technological change.

It's sometimes difficult to remember that, before the computer-crazed days of the late 70s, technology—"the machine"—was often seen as both amoral and totalitarian. Industrialism was a mad evil that transcended East and West, and pollution the proper symbol of technological prowess gone sour and suicidal. This was a bit simpleminded, to be sure, but it's not difficult to argue that it's still closer to the truth than the atmospherics of the micro-computer age, where Apples replace Nukes as the symbols of the technological future, and scientific optimism once again becomes the order of the day.

There have been many commentaries on the computer age, many of them framed with radical intent. But few have sought to view the false promises of computerization against the grim background of ecological destabilization and nuclear terror. Winner is an exception: he analyses the ecological with the electronic, and sees both within a common technological and institutional regime.

For Winner, technological regimes, like institutional regimes, can be either pluralistic or totalitarian: there are "two ways in which artifacts can contain political properties. First are instances in which the

book lacks a strict political or stylistic identity, it also reflects the actual breadth and variety of creative political activity today. That's my kind of identity confusion. From such wide-ranging reflection, creative politics can start to develop a coherent strategy for its own growth.

—by Jeff Goldthorpe

invention, design and arrangement of a specific technological device or system becomes a way of settling an issue in the affairs of a particular community...examples of this kind are fairly straightforward and easily understood. Second are cases of what can be called 'inherently political technologies,' man-made systems that appear to require or to be strongly compatible with particular kinds of political relationships. Arguments about cases of this kind are much more troublesome and closer to the heart of the matter."

Some technologies are flexible, and lend themselves to various constructions—solar power generators, for example, can be decentralized, but they can also be shaped into awkward multi-megawatt facilities, even more absurd than large coal and oil-powered generating stations. It is precisely because some technologies are so flexible that their forms and consequences must be understood socially, in terms of the forces that shape their design and arrangement. Other technologies however, aren't flexible, but rather "strongly, perhaps unavoidably, linked to particular institutionalized patterns of power and authority. Here the initial choice about whether or not to adopt something is decisive in regard to its consequences. There are no alternative physical designs or arrangements that would make a significant difference; there are, furthermore, no genuine possibilities for creative intervention by different social systems—capitalist or socialist—that could change the intractability of the entity or significantly alter the quality of its political effects."

## Inherently Political Technologies

The idea of technologies which lock their human users into prestructured and confining paths is both compelling and venerable. Plato made it in *Republic*, and Engels used it in *On Authority*, a polemic against anarchism. According to Engels, the necessity for rigid factory discipline is "fixed by the authority of the steam," and society, which he likens to a ship on high

seas, must have its captain. Winner does not disagree that some technologies are authoritarian in just this way, but he does shift the notion in a crucial way. For Winner, it's not "technology" in the abstract but specific technologies that are the problem. Examples must be carefully chosen. More to the point is "the hypothesis that the construction and day-to-day operation of many systems of production, transportation, and communications in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries require the development of...large-scale, centralized, hierarchical organizations administered by highly skilled managers."

The matter is complicated. Technologies can't really be separated from the institutional frameworks within which they are grown, nor does reality restrict itself to simple choices between flexible and authoritarian technology. Advocates of solar energy often claim that it is "strongly compatible with, but does not strictly require" decentralized social relations; they no longer make stronger claims. Advocates of nuclear power have been known to claim it to be a "flexible technology whose adverse social effects can be fixed by changing the design parameters of reactors and nuclear waste disposal systems."

Do the social consequences of specific technologies derive from unavoidable social responses to intractable properties in the things themselves? Or are they better seen as patterns imposed by governing bodies, ruling classes, or other social or cultural institutions? This is the important question, and it must be asked in specific terms about specific technologies developed for specific purposes by specific social groups. In the end we must learn to distinguish technologies which can potentially be reshaped from those—like nuclear technology—for which only the abolitionist position is acceptable.

#### A Search for Limits

The idea that technology should be designed, and even limited, as a means of promoting specific social virtues is an old one, being found in the works of Thoreau, Henry Adams, Lewis Mumford, Paul Goodman, Murray Bookchin and a host of other writers, most of whom are nowadays dismissed as "romantics" and even "pastoralists." Interestingly, recent years have seen the revival of the notion that circumstances can indeed justify placing limits on given technologies. Winner lists five reasons currently accepted as legitimate grounds for limiting a technology:

- 1) It threatens public health or safety
- 2) It threatens some vital resource
- 3) It degrades the environment (air, land or water)

- 4) It threatens species and wilderness areas
- 5) It causes social stresses of an exaggerated kind

But note how narrow these reasons are! "Along with ongoing discussions about ways to sustain economic growth, national competitiveness, and prosperity, these are the only matters of technology assessment that the general public, decision makers, and academics are prepared to take seriously...Are there no shared ends that matter to us any longer other than the desire to be affluent while avoiding the risk of cancer? It may be that the answer is no. The prevailing consensus seems to be that people love a life of high consumption, tremble at the thought that it might end, and are displeased about having to clean up the messes that modern technologies sometimes bring. To argue a moral position convincingly these days requires that one speak to (and not depart from) people's love of material well-being."

Winner moves on from our dismal condition to the compromised and uncertain critiques that it has engendered. Noting a comment by Paul Goodman that his student audiences could always be counted on to respond excitedly to arguments that decentralism could be *more efficient* than centralized forms of social organization, Winner notes that such an argument is good for "catching people's attention; if you can get away with it, it is certainly a most convincing kind of argument. Because the idea of efficiency attracts a wide consensus, it is sometimes used as a conceptual Trojan horse by those who have more challenging political agendas they hope to smuggle in. But victories won in this way are in other respects great losses. For they affirm in our words and in our methods that there are certain human ends that no longer dare be spoken in public. Lingering in that stuffy Trojan horse too long, even soldiers of virtue eventually suffocate."

#### Getting Down to Cases

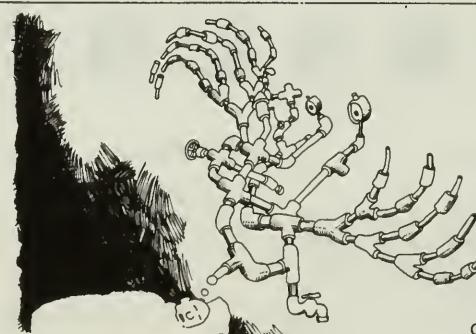
The bulk of this book is actually very

concrete. After his pitch for a philosophy of technology, Winner gets down to cases. There's a good discussion of the Appropriate Technology movement, which Winner sees (despite a few Marxist and Anarchist exceptions) as essentially a movement for consumer choice. "Its political theory—build a better mousetrap!" There's a nice snide discussion of the "hippy environmentalist spacemen" at the *Whole Earth Review*, and a serious review of demonstration-project politics and Utopianism. There's the New Age, which begins on page 74 and ends on 80. There's a long and subtle discussion of decentralism, and a frontal assault on the ideology of the computer revolution.

Winner spends a lot of time on "Nature," reviewing the many roles the concept has played in the technology movements of the last few decades. Nature appears as a stock of economic goods, as an endangered Ecosystem, as a source of intrinsic good, and finally as a socially formed, and by no means natural idea. Ecocatastrophe is discussed ("Indeed, there's a certain vulnerability in placing the crux of one's social philosophy and policy position on the probability of eco-catastrophe. What if new data indicate the emergency wasn't what you said it was? Are you then obligated to apologize and fall silent?"), as are environmental economics, ecological survivalism, and Deep Ecology. Winner's done his homework, and he pegs each movement pretty well. He's critical, but he's fair.

This is rich ore, and well worth mining. It's not brilliant, but perhaps there's nothing particularly brilliant to be said about the politics of technology. There are, however, most assuredly a lot of very stupid things to be said, as any cursory review of the literature will show. Few of them appear in these pages.

—by Tom Athanasiou

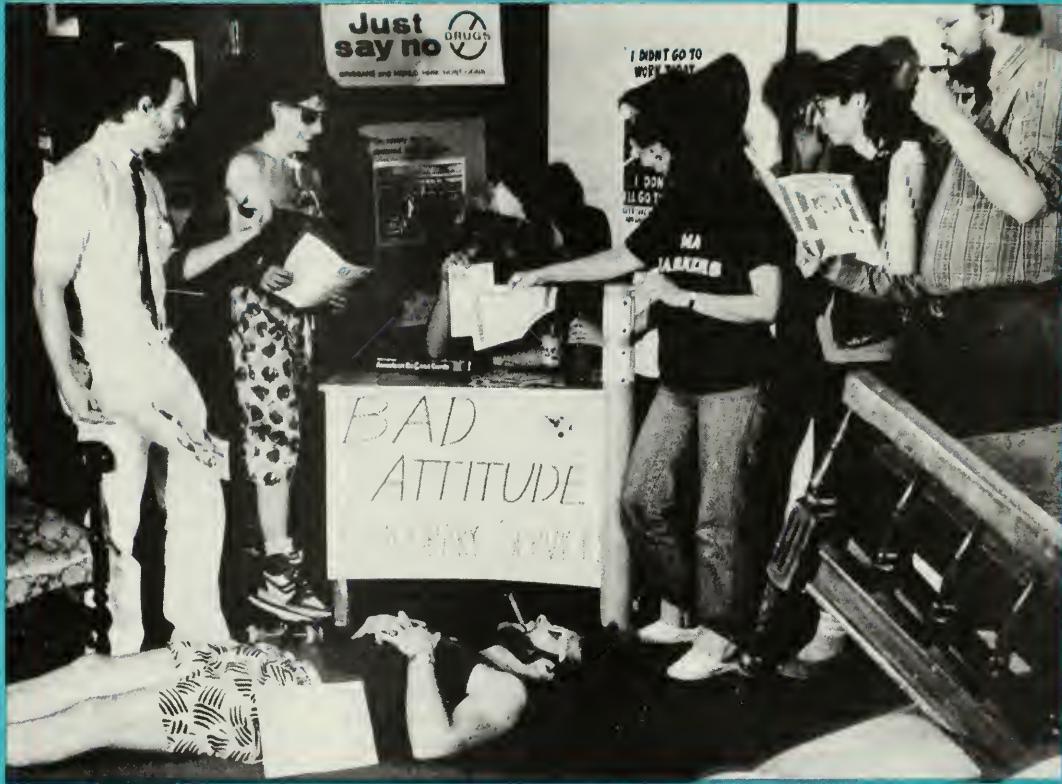


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